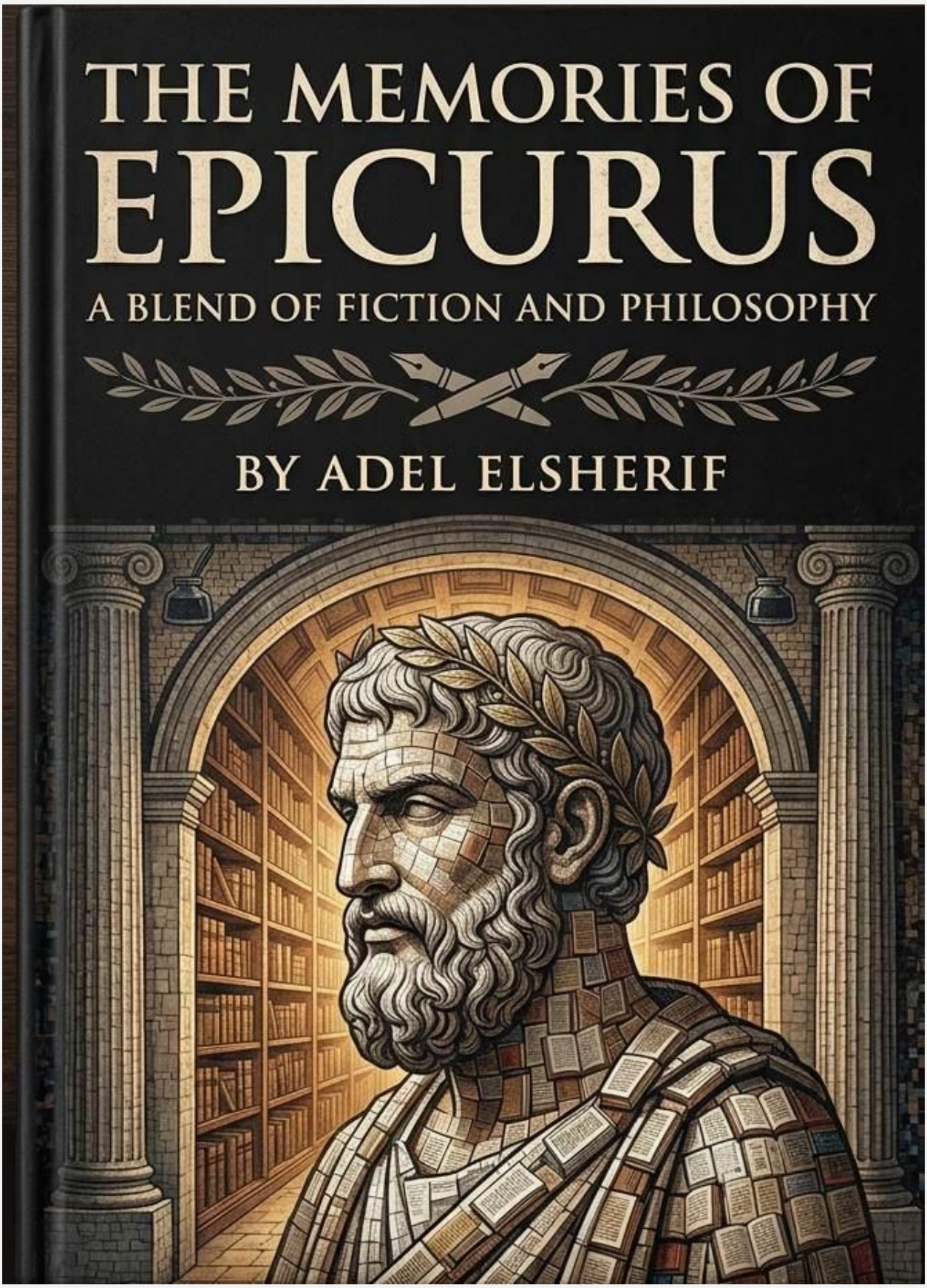
THE MEMORIES OF
EPICURUS
A BLEND OF FICTION AND PHILOSOPHY
BY ADEL ELSHERIF

The Memories of Epicurus: A Blend of Fiction and Philosophy

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Introduction: In The Memories of Epicurus

In this short book, I've tried to do something simple yet profound: to remove the misconceptions that have long clouded the philosophy of Epicurus.

Too often, he's been caricatured as a preacher of indulgence, a lover of luxury, a hedonist without restraint. But the truth is far more beautiful, and far more useful.

These are the pillars of a tranquil life. We've explored his theory of knowledge, rooted in the senses, and contrasted his ideas with those of other schools—Stoics, Cynics, Cyrenaics, and Platonists—to reveal his unique clarity and compassion.

We've walked through the Garden, not just as a place, but as a living ideal. It was a school open to all: rich and poor, free and enslaved, men and women alike.

A sanctuary of reason, friendship, and peace.

This book is more than a guide—it's a memoir of Epicurus. Through fictionalized scenes and dialogues, I've tried to make him speak again.

Not as a distant figure in dusty texts, but as a living voice. These stories are not fantasy; they are rooted in his teachings, his spirit, and his humanity.

We want you to feel Epicurus—not just read about him. To sit with him under the fig tree, to hear his laughter, to watch him offer a simple meal and a profound truth.

To immerse yourself in his memories, and through them, find your own path to happiness.

May this book help you attain tranquility, whatever your condition. May it guide you gently toward the life Epicurus envisioned: simple, fearless, and free.

In addition to philosophical reflection, this book offers practical advice on applying Epicureanism in everyday life, and explores the biology of happiness.

Note: While this memoir is a work of fiction, it is deeply inspired by the life, sayings, and ideas of Epicurus. Every scene and insight is grounded in his philosophy and legacy.

The Language of Tranquility, Epicurean Terms Explained

To truly grasp the philosophy of Epicurus, one must first learn the language he spoke, not just in words, but in ideas.

These terms are not mere jargon; they are keys to a worldview built on peace, pleasure, and freedom from fear.

Each concept opens a door to a life lived deliberately, simply, and joyfully.

Below are some of the most essential terms in Epicurean thought—each one a stepping stone toward serenity.

Ataraxia (ἀταραξία)

A state of serene calm and freedom from mental disturbance. For Epicurus, this was one of the highest pleasures: a mind untroubled by fear, anxiety, or irrational desire.

Aponia (ἀπονία)

The absence of physical pain. Alongside ataraxia, aponia completes the Epicurean vision of happiness—not through indulgence, but through the quiet joy of being free from suffering.

Pleasure (ἡδονή / hēdonē)

Epicurus called pleasure the beginning and end of a blessed life. But he distinguished between kinetic pleasures (active sensations) and katastematic pleasures (stable states like ataraxia and aponia). The latter were deeper and more enduring.

Tetrapharmakos (τετραφάρμακος)

The "Fourfold Remedy," a philosophical prescription for peace of mind:

1. Don't fear God
2. Don't worry about death
3. What is good is easy to get
4. What is terrible is easy to endure

Physis (φύσις)

Nature. Epicurus believed that understanding nature—especially through atomism—was essential to freeing ourselves from superstition and fear.

Epibolē (ἐπιβολή)

Mental focus or directed attention. Epicurus used this term to describe how we engage with sensations and ideas, forming judgments and beliefs through conscious reflection.

Prolepsis (πρόληψις)

Preconception or innate idea. These are basic mental templates formed from repeated experiences, which help us recognize and understand new things, like our intuitive sense of justice or friendship.

Dikaiosynē (δικαιοσύνη)

Justice. Epicurus saw justice as a mutual agreement not to harm or be harmed. It's not absolute, but contextual, what's just is what fosters peace and mutual benefit.

Desire (ἐπιθυμία / epithymia)

Epicurus divided desires into three types:

- Natural and necessary (e.g., food, shelter)

- Natural but unnecessary (e.g., luxury foods)

- Neither natural nor necessary (e.g., fame, power)

Epicurus's Early Life

Epicurus's Memoirs : superstitions.

Even while sick, lying in my bed, they continue to spread lies against me. They were disturbed by my bold ideas—ideas that shake their feeble minds that are filled with anger and revenge.

They cannot defeat my philosophy, so they bite at my back like stray dogs.

I am writing my story to tell future generations who Epicurus truly was.

I was born on the island of Samos, though my family was of Athenian origin. My father, an Athenian by birth, was kind but serious.

My mother was well-known in our city—many foolish people believed she could speak to the gods and see the future.

Since childhood, I loved traveling alone to natural places—mountains, valleys, quiet groves.

I found great joy in thinking and questioning everything around me..

My curiosity made it difficult to connect with others who didn't share my hunger for truth. I felt different, unique.

That feeling drove me to spend long hours reading anything I could find.

I watched poor people give my mother nearly all they had, hoping to learn their fate.

They didn't realize they could shape their own destiny, if only they understood that everything is made of atoms, that randomness rules the cosmos.

There is no divine plan, no fate—only actions, even small ones, that lead to joy or suffering.

My mother often visited wealthy homes to tell fortunes about trivial matters,travel, marriage, gossip.

She sometimes laughed at their requests.

One rich woman asked her to cast a spell to make a man fall in love with her. My mother made a tiny bag of herbs and told her to throw it under his feet when she saw him.

The girl was shy and too timid to even speak to him. Two years later, she returned, asking for magic to cure her shyness. She still had the herbs.

I saw the working class burdened by poverty, yet still giving sacrifices to the gods.

They handed their offerings to priests, who smiled at the foolishness of those who believed their rituals pleased divine beings.

I never believed my mother's claims, but I loved her. I knew she was deceiving people, and I didn't pity them. They were drowning in ignorance.

As the author of this work, I now step outside Epicurus's voice to offer historical context.

Epicurus rebelled against nearly every dominant tradition of his time—he rejected the authority of the gods, criticized popular philosophies like Platonism, and boldly challenged the intellectual elite. His radical ideas earned him many enemies among fellow philosophers.

Epicurus was born to Athenian parents on the island of Samos in February 341 B.C.—a date known with uncommon precision for ancient figures.

His father, Neocles, was an Athenian schoolteacher, a profession lightly regarded in their society.

His mother, Chaerestrate, was known for performing rites of purification in the homes of the poor. Epicurus sometimes assisted her by reading charms, a childhood experience that may have contributed to his lifelong hatred of superstition.

Epicurus had many enemies during his lifetime, which led later scholars to believe the slanders spread by his foes. In truth, he was a remarkably simple man.

His hedonism was not about excessive eating or drinking—it was about enjoying small pleasures and cultivating peace of mind.

When he was dying and gravely ill, he requested only a piece of cheese and a little bread.

Philosophical Influences on Epicurus

Epicurus's philosophy was a complex synthesis, drawing positive inspiration from some thinkers while defining itself in opposition to others.

He is considered to have revived the tradition of Ionian thinkers, which had been interrupted by Socrates and Plato, with Ionian thought serving as his chief positive influence and Platonism as his chief negative influence.

Democritus and Leucippus (Atomists): Epicurus espoused and revived the atomic theory, inheriting and elaborating the ideas of invisible and indivisible bodies from these Ionian thinkers.

He also derived aspects of his psychology (theory of Images), cosmogony, and theology from Democritus.

Despite some later criticisms, Epicurus generally spoke of Democritus with respect.

Plato: Epicurus's relationship with Plato was primarily one of opposition and critique.

Although he studied with the Platonist Pamphilus in Samos for about four years during his youth—a period likely arranged by his parents due to Platonism's orthodox status—Epicurus later became a strong anti-Platonist.

He rejected Plato's hypostatized Reason as the norm of truth and opposed Plato's rigidly regimented political systems.

His own classification of desires originated from a Platonic hint. More than half of his forty Authorized Doctrines directly contradict Platonic teachings.

His concept of Prolepsis (Anticipation) directly countered Plato's anamnesis (recollection).

Aristotle: Aristotle was a significant, though often unacknowledged, influence, particularly in epistemology and biology.

Aristotle's shift of focus from inorganic to organic nature, revealing a “terrestrial order” of nature, was tacitly recognized by Epicurus, who subsequently emphasized nature as the norm of truth.

Epicurus's theory of innate ideas (Anticipations) might have been influenced by Aristotle's study of the embryo.

His theories on pleasure and justice also drew from observations of animal behavior, an area of Aristotle's interest.

Formation of the Garden School

Epicurus established his school in Athens in 306 B.C., conducting his teaching within a house and garden that he owned.

This property, purchased for eighty minae—a sum less than what a sophist might charge for a single course—was often referred to as a “little garden” (hortulus), suggesting its modest size.

The house stood within the city walls in the Melite district, while the garden lay just outside the old Dipylon Gate, along the same road that led to Plato’s Academy.

Epicurus’s decision to create this private space for instruction was a deliberate and strategic choice, allowing him to avoid persecution and the interference of public authorities.

The Garden valued leadership, reverence for superiors, and the fostering of love and friendship among its members. Epicurus, as its head, took the title of hegemon, meaning “leader” or “guide.”

He welcomed pupils of all ages, including women and children—a notable departure from the typical focus on adolescent males in other schools of the time.

He also rejected the term “schoolteacher,” which he associated with a coercive style of instruction.

Instead, he preferred titles that reflected guidance and persuasion, in harmony with his conviction that “human nature is not to be coerced but persuaded.”

The Garden of Epicurus

The Garden: Community, Practices, and Daily Life

Epicurus’s school, commonly known as The Garden, was a unique philosophical community established in Athens around 307–306 B.C.

It was not merely a place of instruction but functioned as a structured society with distinct social, economic, and philosophical practices.

Its influence extended far beyond its own time, shaping later philosophical traditions and even leaving an imprint on early Christian communal life.

I. Community Structure and Membership

The Garden was organized around principles of leadership, reverence for superiors, love, and fellowship, resembling a Hellenic household or even a “secular church.”

Epicurus, known as the Master or hegemon (leader/guide), presided over a diverse membership: resident adults, adolescent students, and women such as Mammarion, Hedeia, and Erotion.

Notably, slaves were integral members of the community.

They lived within its premises and contributed to its operations, especially in manuscript copying and publishing.

Prominent disciples like Metrodorus, Polyaenus, and Hermarchus served as Kathegemones (“Guides”), assisting in teaching and governance.

Epicurus’s vision for The Garden was democratic in spirit

It was opened to anyone willing to listen, rather than an esoteric sect restricted to the elite.

Yet it also cultivated a deep sense of unanimity and mutual care, functioning as a “family of brothers” with Epicurus as the symbolic “father.”

Central to this ethos was friendship (oikeiotēs, meaning “membership in the family”), which Epicurus called the most precious acquisition for a blessed life.

Members were encouraged to practice respect, forgiveness, and love for one another, directly challenging the competitive and status-driven norms of the outside world.

II. Practices and Daily Life

Frugality and Self-Sufficiency

Life in The Garden was marked by simplicity. Happiness was sought not in abundance but in freedom from pain and moderation of desires.

Epicurus famously remarked that they were content with “half a pint of wine” and “for the most part drank water.”

Unlike the Pythagoreans, he discouraged pooling all possessions into a common stock, seeing it as a sign of distrust.

The community was resourceful—during the siege of Athens, Epicurus kept members alive by literally “counting out the beans.”

They believed that life’s greatest ills arose from internal passions and ignorance, and that virtues such as temperance and modesty could overcome poverty, slander, and misfortune.

Education and Philosophy

The Garden offered an integrated curriculum of:

- Canon (method of knowledge)

- Physics (study of nature)

- Ethics (principles of choice and avoidance)

This program rivaled the Platonic Academy.

Epicurus emphasized persuasion over coercion in teaching. Instructors were “leaders” or “guides,” not authoritarian “schoolmasters.”

Elementary pupils, called (“in course of preparation”), were trained in moral discipline, a term later echoed in the Christian catechumens. Classes were held in various corners of the Garden from early morning until late in the day.

The ultimate aim was ataraxia (tranquility) and aponia (freedom from pain), achieved through understanding the nature of the gods, the inevitability of death, and the value of friendship. Epicurus rejected

Plato’s reliance on abstract Reason, instead grounding truth in direct experience—sensations, anticipations, and feelings.

Social and Ritual Gatherings

Regular philosophical symposiums—often called “love-feasts” (agapai)—were held, reminiscent of early Christian communal meals. These took place on the twentieth of each month, a day with quasi-sabbath sanctity in the Greek calendar ().

On such occasions, the usual austerity was relaxed, with fine wine and quality food served. Epicurus also instituted ritual offerings at the tombs of deceased members and encouraged the writing of pious memoirs, granting a form of immortality through remembrance.

Daily Schedule

While no fixed timetable survives, similar pre-Christian communities such as the Essenes divided the day into three equal parts: labor, recreation/instruction, and sleep. Meals were taken at a common table, with designated cooks, buyers, and servers. The Garden likely followed a comparable rhythm, emphasizing mutual support and self-sufficiency over charity.

Recreation and Arts

All “innocent recreations” were permitted, including music, though licentious poetry was discouraged. Epicurus valued intellectual pursuits but urged that they serve the study of virtue and human nature. For example, Polyaenus, a skilled geometer, was encouraged to devote more time to moral philosophy.

Physical Setting

The school comprised Epicurus's private house in the respectable district of Melite and a modest but beautiful garden outside the Dipylon Gate, on the road to the Academy.

The house doubled as a publishing center, where slaves copied manuscripts. Communal spaces included a vaulted, circular hall in a temple-like building, adorned with paintings and a statue of Venus Urania, as well as a library where Epicurus and Metrodorus studied and transcribed texts. Shaded paths and quiet corners provided an ideal setting for contemplation and discussion.

III. Core Philosophical Attitudes

Epicurus promoted a democratic philosophy aimed at bringing happiness to all.

His Tetrapharmakon ("Fourfold Remedy") taught:

1. Do not fear the gods.
2. Do not fear death.
3. What is good is easy to obtain.
4. What is terrible is easy to endure.

Epicurus also advised living "unknown" (lathe biōsas)—avoiding public ambition and political entanglements—to preserve tranquility. Ethical conduct, self-knowledge, and the cultivation of inner peace were the cornerstones of his teaching.

More about the school :

Inclusivity:

The Garden's acceptance of women and even slaves was radical for its time, challenging prevailing Athenian social hierarchies.

Contrast with Other Schools:

Unlike the Stoics, who embraced public duty, Epicureans sought withdrawal from political life, focusing on personal and communal well-being.

Legacy: The Garden's emphasis on friendship, shared meals, and ritual remembrance foreshadowed aspects of monastic and early Christian communities.

Epicurus's Memoirs – Plato's Republic vs The Garden

I awoke in the morning and, after a simple breakfast with a few of my followers, I wrote a chapter in my book The Canon.

Today was no ordinary day, I was preparing to meet Crates of Athens, successor to Polemon at the Academy.

He had invited me to visit the Academy, but I sent him a letter instead, asking that he come to The Garden. In the end, he agreed.

I arranged a comfortable place for him beneath the shade of the trees, where the air was sweet with the scent of flowers.

I chose to greet him alone, without attendants, as a gesture of respect.

Soon I saw him approaching on foot. I rose to welcome him, and we sat together.

"Would you care for dinner?" I asked.

"Just water," he replied.

One of my students, a graceful young woman, stepped forward and poured him a cup of cool water.

I smiled. "Though your Academy is so near to my Garden, this is the first time we have met."

Crates returned the smile, though with a measured tone.

"You are the reason, Epicurus. You've criticized our master Plato, and that has made you a rival to the Academy. Still, when your letter reached me, I accepted — though most of my colleagues refused."

"That is an honor for me, Crates," I said.

I smiled again. “I’m glad your Academy now admits women among its students. That is a step toward wisdom. But tell me — why not slaves? Are they not also capable of reason, of friendship, of seeking a good life?”

Crates replied, “Epicurus, you know the customs of the city. A slave’s duty is to serve his master, not to engage in lofty debates. The Academy is a place for free citizens — those who can participate in the polis.”

I answered in a serious tone, “And yet, is not the love of wisdom free by nature? Does truth ask for a man’s birth certificate before it enters his mind? In The Garden, we judge not by station but by the soul’s hunger for peace. A slave who understands the nature of the world is freer than a citizen chained by ignorance.”

He pondered for a moment. “Perhaps in the future we may accept slaves, as we have included women. But most of my colleagues oppose the idea, believing that a slave has no freedom. Still, I am sure many possess reason, as any human being does.”

I replied, “It is good to know you admit that slaves have reason, just as free men do — for they are human beings. To me, a wise slave is better than an unwise free man. Chance may have chosen our station, but we can choose to shape our lives through free will.”

Crates nodded. “Yes, Epicurus, I believe a man can choose — but only when his soul is trained to see the Good. Without that, he is a prisoner of ignorance, whether slave or free.”

I nodded in return. “I’m glad to hear it. To me, both slave and free man can choose their actions — for the swerve of the atoms grants each the power to shape his own path toward happiness.”

Crates replied, “As a Platonist, I do not believe in atoms, Epicurus. I hold that the soul is by nature virtuous — its true freedom lies in turning toward the Good, not in the random motion of matter.”

Then he asked for more water. The graceful woman stepped forward to pour it, and he looked at her face with a smile, thanking her softly.

He drank, then suddenly fixed his gaze on my eyes.

“Why have you made Plato your enemy? Is it wise to make enemies of everyone — the Stoics, the Aristotelians, even the Skeptics? It seems you seek attention by opposing everybody.”

I replied calmly, with the voice of a teacher:

“Crates, I do not oppose Plato out of malice. But his philosophy draws men away from the truth of nature. He speaks of perfect Forms no one has ever seen. He builds his Republic in the clouds; I build my Garden on the earth.

He turns the soul from the senses; I say the senses are our first guides. He would have men live for the city; I would have them live for themselves and their friends, free from politics.

I wish only to free people from fear — of gods, of death, of chasing honors in a city that will never be perfect.

That means parting with beautiful illusions, however noble.

Crates leaned back, cup in hand.

“Epicurus, I respect your conviction. But to us, the soul is not made of atoms. It is divine, ordered toward the Good.

A slave’s body may be bound, but his soul is free when it turns to virtue.

The Good is not in chance, but in the harmony of reason.

You see enemies; I see fellow seekers. Plato’s vision does not chain men — it lifts them toward what is eternal. Perhaps you doubt the soul can rise above the senses.”

I smiled faintly. “Crates, I have managed to build a republic of my own — one founded on brotherhood, friendship, and true equality. It lives here, in The Garden, not in the pages of a dream.”

Crates’s face tightened, the easy smile gone. He set the cup down with a sharp click.

“Epicurus, you insult not only Plato but the very pursuit of the highest truth. To call The Republic a bedtime story for children is arrogance, not wisdom.

You dismiss what you do not understand — the vision of a just city, the harmony of the soul, the ascent toward the Good.

You may boast of your Garden, but do not mistake a circle of friends for the order of a true republic. Plato’s work is no fantasy — it is the blueprint for the soul’s perfection. Mock it again, and you mock philosophy itself.

Crates stood slowly, brushing the dust from his robe. His expression had softened.

“Epicurus, I thank you for your hospitality — and your honesty. Though we disagree, I see the sincerity in your words.”

He paused, then bowed his head slightly.

“If I spoke too harshly, forgive me. Perhaps one day, I will return — not to argue, but to listen.”

I nodded with warmth. “The Garden is always open, Crates. Truth grows best where friendship is allowed to bloom.”

He smiled faintly, then turned and walked back toward the city, the scent of flowers still lingering in the air behind him.

Main Difference Between Plato and Epicurus

Plato and Epicurus offered two sharply different visions of philosophy’s purpose and method.

- **Plato** placed Reason above all, holding that truth resides in eternal, incorporeal Forms.

The senses, to him, were unreliable; only dialectic could lead the soul upward toward the Form of the Good.

Virtue was pursued for its own sake, and just life was inseparable from one’s role as a citizen in a well-ordered state. His ideal society was a highly structured republic, governed by philosopher-kings, with the harmony of the city reflecting the harmony of the soul.

- **Epicurus** grounded truth in Nature, tested by the evidence of the senses, anticipations, and feelings.

He favored minimal government, withdrawal from politics, and life in a small, equal community bound by friendship, where women, slaves, and foreigners could be philosophical equals.

In essence: Plato sought the perfection of the soul through the perfection of the state; Epicurus sought the peace of the soul through freedom from the state.

While most of Plato’s works have survived, the vast majority of Epicurus’s writings are lost.

Ancient historians claimed he wrote more than Plato, yet today we possess only fragments and letters, a silence in the record that leaves his living voice largely to our imagination.

Canon of Truth : Epistemology

Introduction: A Philosophy Rooted in Nature

Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher of the Garden, built his epistemology not on abstract reasoning or metaphysical speculation, but on the direct, unfiltered data of nature.

His "Canon"—the criterion of truth—was a radical departure from Platonic idealism and even from Aristotelian logic, which he respected but ultimately sidelined in his search for certainty.

For Epicurus, truth begins and ends with the senses. Everything else—logic, interpretation, belief—is secondary and prone to error.

The Infallibility of the Senses

Epicurus held that the senses never lie. They are the body's direct interface with reality, and their reports are always true in the context in which they occur.

Example: The Tower Illusion

- From a distance, a square tower may appear round.

- The sense-impression ("roundness") is not false—it reflects the conditions of perception.

- The error arises when the mind judges, "The tower is round," ignoring the context.

This distinction between aisthēsis (sensation) and doxa (judgment) is central.

Sensation is raw and reliable; judgment is interpretive and fallible.

Logic: Useful but Not Foundational

Epicurus did not reject logic outright. He used it instrumentally—for teaching, clarifying, and defending his views—but he did not see it as a source of truth.

Example: The Sorites Paradox ("What is a heap?")

- Logical puzzles like this may entertain or challenge the intellect.

- But they do not contribute to ataraxia (peace of mind) or eudaimonia (happiness).

- Epicurus would say: “Knowing what a heap is won’t help you sleep better at night.”

Instead of chasing abstract definitions, Epicurus urged us to focus on what can be directly observed and felt.

Atoms and the Limits of Sensory Proof

Interestingly, Epicurus did propose theories—like atomic physics—that could not be directly verified by the senses. But he justified these through analogy and inference from observable phenomena.

Example: Atoms

- We cannot see atoms, but we observe their effects (e.g., motion, change, decay).

- Epicurus argued that the atomic theory best explains these sensory facts.

- Thus, even speculative reasoning must be grounded in empirical data.

This shows that while Epicurus avoided metaphysics, he allowed reason to extend sensory knowledge, so long as it remained tethered to it.

Pleasure as the Evident Good

Epicurus famously claimed that pleasure is the highest good, and he refused to argue for it. Why?

Because, he said, it is self-evident. Every living being seeks pleasure and avoids pain.

To demand a proof for this is to ignore the most basic data of experience.

Example: A Child and Honey

A child reaches for honey instinctively.

No one teaches the child that sweetness is good, it is felt directly.

Epicurus saw this as proof that pleasure is a natural guide.

Those who deny this need not be argued with; they simply need to observe themselves more honestly.

Epistemology as Ethical Armor

Epicurus's epistemology wasn't just theoretical, it was therapeutic.

By trusting the senses and rejecting superstition, we free ourselves from fear and anxiety.

Example: Fear of the Gods

Superstitious beliefs about divine punishment cause immense suffering.

Epicurus taught that the gods, if they exist, are indifferent to human affairs.

This conclusion is based on the lack of sensory evidence for divine intervention.

Thus, epistemology becomes a shield against irrational fears.

Philosophy of Clarity and Calm

Epicurus's Canon is a call to return to the body, to nature, to what is directly given. In a world of endless interpretations and abstract systems, he offers a simple but profound alternative: trust your senses, seek pleasure, and live free from fear.

His epistemology is not just a theory of knowledge, it's a guide to happiness.

Under the Fig Tree: A Dialogue Between Epicurus and Epictetus

They called me many things, filthy talker, corrupter of youth, enemy of virtue. The Stoics especially hated me. Epictetus, their iron-willed sage, once dismissed my teachings as indulgent nonsense. But I had a plan.

I sent word through Cato the Cynic, a man with one foot in every school and no loyalty to any.

I asked him to convince Epictetus to visit my Garden. I knew of his leg, crippled from youth, so I sent a horse-drawn cart to fetch him gently. He accepted. That alone showed courage.

I was excited. The man who scorned me was coming to sit beneath my fig tree.

It was winter, but the breeze was soft and fragrant.

Flowers bloomed early that year, as if nature herself wanted to witness our meeting.

I sat waiting in the shade, surrounded by my students, young and old, reading, writing, debating.

When Epictetus arrived, I stood and smiled warmly.

“I’m happy to meet you,” I said. “I know you know only what others told you.”

He was striking, dark-skinned, bald, broad-shouldered.

He looked more like a gladiator than a philosopher. His eyes were sharp, but not unkind.

“I read your letter,” he said. “You claim indulgence in sex and wine is a virtuous act.”

A graceful woman approached with a plate of figs, cool water, and a small cup of Andreana wine. I gestured to the Garden.,

“Look around,” I said. “Do you see indulgence?

Do you see orgies or drunkenness? You see old men and young people discussing philosophy. You may walk the grounds yourself. This is a school.”

He frowned slightly.

“But I read your words.”

,“Then you read a forgery,” I replied. “I’ll give you my Canon. There you’ll see what I mean by pleasure, not indulgence, but the absence of pain, the calm of the body, the peace of the soul.”,

He relaxed. I invited him to eat. He took a fig slowly, drank the water, and sipped the wine. I offered soup. He thanked me.

I ate only two figs myself. My stomach was light, my spirit lighter.

A young man brought a bowl to wash his hands. Epictetus smiled and thanked him.

Then I picked up an apple.

“This,” I said, “is an apple. I lift it—I feel its weight. I bite it—it is sweet and fresh. I know this is good. Do you agree?”

He nodded slowly.,

“Yes, I agree. But good or bad is more complicated than that.”

I leaned forward.

“Is it? The senses tell me it is sweet. My body tells me it nourishes.

My mind is calm. What more do I need?"

He looked at me, thoughtful.

"The mind must judge. The impression may be sweet, but the wise man asks: is it good for the soul? Does it serve virtue?"

"And I ask," I replied, "does it serve peace? Does it free us from fear and pain? That is my virtue."

We sat in silence for a moment, the breeze rustling the fig leaves above us.

Two men, two philosophies.

One trusted the senses, the other trusted reason. But both sought the same thing: a life without disturbance.

And in that moment, under the fig tree, we were not enemies. We were seekers.

Difference between the epistemology of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy.

Epicurus believed that truth begins with the senses.

For him, the senses are infallible, they report reality as it appears, without distortion. If a tower looks round from a distance, that's not a mistake of the senses; it's a faithful report of how the tower appears under those conditions.

The error arises when the mind judges, "The tower is round," without further investigation. Epicurean epistemology rests on this principle: sensory data is pure, and mistakes come from interpretation.

Therefore, the path to truth is to trust the senses and avoid abstract reasoning that leads to superstition or fear.

In contrast, the Stoics placed reason at the center of their epistemology.

They acknowledged that the senses provide impressions, but these impressions are not automatically trustworthy. Instead, the mind must evaluate them through reason.

The Stoics introduced the concept of impressions, those that are so clear and distinct that they compel rational assent.

Only these impressions can be considered true. For example, if you feel pain in your leg, the impression “I am in pain” might be true, but the judgment “This pain is unbearable and life is terrible” must be examined and possibly rejected by reason.

A classic Stoic example involves emotional response. Suppose someone insults you.

The initial impression might be “I’ve been wronged,” followed by anger.

But the Stoic would pause and ask: is this impression in accordance with nature and reason? Is the insult truly harmful, or is it merely a disturbance of ego?

By applying rational scrutiny, the Stoic discards the false judgment and maintains equanimity.

Epicurus would say that such emotional turmoil can be avoided by understanding the natural limits of pleasure and pain. If you know that death is nothing to fear, and that pain is either brief or manageable, you won’t be disturbed. But he wouldn’t rely on logical argument to prove this, he’d point to the direct experience of pleasure and the absence of pain as self-evident guides.

The Stoics, however, believed that living in accordance with nature meant living rationally.

Their epistemology was deeply tied to their ethics: to be virtuous, one must know what is truly good, and that requires a rigorous process of evaluating impressions.

They saw logic not just as a tool, but as a necessary discipline for achieving wisdom.,

So while Epicurus sought peace of mind through sensory clarity and minimal reasoning, the Stoics pursued moral clarity through disciplined rationality.

Both aimed at tranquility, but they took very different roads to get there.

Epicureanism: A Proto-Scientific Approach

Epicurus built his philosophy on empirical observation and naturalistic explanations.

He adopted atomism from Democritus, proposing that everything in the universe—including the soul—is made of tiny, indivisible particles (atoms) moving through the void. This was a materialist view of the world, rejecting supernatural causes and divine intervention.

Empirical foundation: Epicurus believed that knowledge comes from the senses, which provide direct and reliable data. He emphasized observation over speculation.

Rejection of metaphysics:

He dismissed abstract reasoning that couldn't be grounded in sensory evidence.

Natural explanations:

He explained phenomena like thunder or earthquakes through physical causes, not divine wrath.

Fear reduction:

His goal was to eliminate fear, especially fear of gods and death, by understanding nature rationally.

In many ways, Epicureanism anticipated the scientific method: observe, hypothesize, and explain phenomena based on evidence.

Stoicism: Rational but Metaphysical

Stoicism, while deeply rational, is more metaphysical in its foundations. The Stoics believed the universe was governed by divine reason (Logos)—a kind of cosmic intelligence.

They saw nature as purposeful and ordered, and human reason as a reflection of this divine structure.

Reason as the path to truth:

Stoics emphasized logical analysis and cognitive control.

Metaphysical assumptions:

They believed in fate, providence, and a rational cosmos.

Ethical focus:

Their epistemology served moral development more than scientific inquiry.

While Stoicism influenced modern psychology (especially cognitive behavioral therapy), its cosmology and epistemology are less empirical than Epicureanism.

Verdict: Epicureanism Is More Scientific

Epicurus was closer to a natural scientist than a metaphysical.

His commitment to sense data, atomism, and natural causes makes his philosophy more compatible with modern scientific thinking. Stoicism, though brilliant in its ethical and psychological insights, leans more toward rational idealism than empirical science.,

Epicurus and the Gods

A Philosophy of Tranquility

Epicurus realized that fear of the gods disturbed peace of mind and hindered true happiness. He rebelled against the traditional, human-like deities—those imagined in the likeness of flawed mortals and instead embraced a conception of the gods that reflected his own aspiration for tranquility.

For Epicurus, the ultimate goal was to live like the gods: serene, undisturbed, and free from pain or anxiety.

Their role, he believed, was symbolic not authoritative. Much like the Queen of the United Kingdom, they were revered and respected, yet held no real power over human affairs.

Epicurus held distinct and often counter-intuitive views on the gods, which formed a cornerstone of his philosophy aimed at achieving human tranquility.

He firmly believed in the existence of gods, but his conception of them differed significantly from popular religious beliefs—particularly in his emphasis that fear of the gods is not justified.

Epicurus on the Nature of the Gods: A Non-Traditional View Rooted in Natural Philosophy

Epicurus held a radically different view of the divine compared to the popular beliefs of his time.

His conception of the gods emphasized their tranquility, and detachment from human affairs, aligning them more with natural harmony than with supernatural authority.

1. Immortality.

"First of all believe that god is a being immortal and blessed, even as the common idea of a god is engraved on men's minds, and do not assign to him anything alien to his immortality or ill-suited to his blessedness: but believe about him everything that can uphold his blessedness and immortality.

For gods there are, since the knowledge of them is by clear vision."

—Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

This quote establishes the Epicurean view that gods are immortal and that any belief about them must be consistent with these attributes. Epicurus rejects portrayals of gods as angry, vengeful, or interfering—such traits are incompatible with divine tranquility.

The phrase "clear vision" refers to mental perceptions or similar images of the gods that arise in the mind, not through sensory experience or religious dogma.

2. Redefining Impiety

"And the impious man is not he who denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many."

-Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

***Epicurus redefines impiety*.**

True irreverence, he argues, is not disbelief in popular gods, but the misattribution of flawed human traits—like wrath or favoritism—to the divine.

He distinguishes between the gods of philosophy and the gods of the masses, challenging traditional theology.

3. Divine Tranquility

This core doctrine asserts that the divine nature is free from emotional disturbance.

Anger and favor are signs of weakness, and therefore incompatible with the serene, incorruptible nature of the gods.

This directly contradicts traditional portrayals of gods who punish or reward.

4. Celestial Bodies Are Not Divine

"Nor again must we believe that they, which are but fire agglomerated in a Mass, possess blessedness, and voluntarily take upon themselves these movements."

But we must preserve their full majestic significance in all expressions which we apply to such conceptions, in order that there may not arise out of them opinions contrary to this notion of majesty."

Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus

Epicurus rejects the idea that celestial bodies—stars, planets, comets—are divine beings.

He describes them as material conglomerations, governed by natural laws.

Their movements are not voluntary or divine, but mechanical.

True majesty lies in understanding their nature, not worshipping them.

Epicurus's Memoirs: Gods do not like bribes.

While walking along the hill at sunset, I watched the sun disappear behind the horizon, painting the sky with a charm that filled me with quiet happiness. I often close my eyes and imagine atoms dancing in the air—images more beautiful than the sunset itself. Beauty is everywhere. But when I walk through my garden and see nature's grace, I feel undisturbed, at peace.

From the hilltop, I gaze down at the temple and the people gathered below.

Their rituals stir a chain of thoughts that never ceases. When I think deeply, I feel the same pleasure as when I sit among friends sharing simple food, or when I run my fingers through the hair of a beautiful woman. Thought itself is a pleasure.

I've always wondered why people waste their lives worshipping gods who never intervene—not even to offer a cup of water to the thirsty.

These Athenians inherited their beliefs like they inherited their language, their customs, their appearance.

They never stop to question, never apply reason or critical thought to test whether these gods truly care.

Where are the gods when earthquakes destroy cities without mercy?

Where are they when villages burn and the skies remain dry?

Where are they when criminals and tyrants slaughter the innocent?

These are not gods as people imagine them. The gods I know are made of atoms.

They are serene, untouched by mortal suffering. They did not create us.

They did not move the universe.

They are not the unmoved movers of Aristotle, nor the ghostly abstractions of Plato and his deluded followers. They are not the moral overseers of Socrates.

And so I ask myself again: if gods exist but remain indifferent, why must we believe in them?

Ah, but if I deny them, I will be attacked. I will lose friends. I will be called an atheist—a word soaked in stigma, the same accusation that led to Socrates' death. I will lose my peace of mind. And for what?

Suddenly, I noticed a man whose face seemed familiar. He wore clean white garments and carried offerings in his arms—fruits, incense, and a small jug of oil.

I approached him and asked, "Where are you going with those offerings?"

The man looked up, recognized me, and smiled. "Epicurus," he said warmly, "I'm on my way to the temple to give my sacrifices to the gods."

I nodded, then asked gently, "Do you have children, my friend?"

"Yes," he replied. "Four sons."

I paused, then said, "Do you think the gods need these things—or is it the priests who do? Leave these gifts for your children. Worship the gods with reverence, not with bribes. The gods are rich—they want nothing material from us."

The man scratched his balding head, looked down at the offerings, and quietly turned back toward his home.

As he walked away, I called out, "Respect the gods, my friend—but don't try to buy their favor."

Epicurus held distinct and often counter-intuitive views on the gods, which formed a cornerstone of his philosophy aimed at achieving human tranquility.

He firmly believed in the existence of gods, but his conception of them differed significantly from popular religious beliefs, particularly in his emphasis that fear of the gods is not justified.

Epicurus's Conception of the Gods

Existence and Knowledge

Epicurus maintained that the existence of gods is certain because the knowledge of them is a “universal idea” or “pre-notion” (prolepsis) common to all humanity, implanted by Nature itself.

This knowledge is not derived from physical senses, but directly by the mind through “mental images” or “apprehensions” (/ epibolē tēs dianoias), often experienced in dreams.

Nature and Attributes

The gods, according to Epicurus, are “blessed and incorruptible.”

He specifically used the term “incorruptible” rather than “immortal,” implying that while they are theoretically subject to dissolution, they avoid it in practice. These divine beings possess perfect happiness and are free from all trouble, care, and anxiety.

Form and Abode

Epicurus described the gods as corporeal beings with human (anthropomorphic) form—though larger, more beautiful, and ethereal in nature. Their dwelling place is in the intermundia—the spaces between worlds—where they remain untouched by the dangers and concerns of any single world.

Inaction and Non-Interference

Crucially, Epicurus taught that the gods do not interfere in human affairs or govern the world. They neither cause trouble nor offer favor, feeling neither anger nor affection. Such emotions, he argued, imply weakness and are inconsistent with their serene nature.

Piety and Worship

Epicurus allowed and even practiced public worship and religious ceremonies—not out of fear or hope for divine intervention, but as a form of reverence for their excellence and as a means of achieving ataraxia (tranquility). He emphasized that the proper attitude toward the gods is eusebeia (reverence), not fear.

Why the Fear of Gods Is Not Justified

Epicurus argued against the fear of gods for several fundamental reasons:

1. Inconsistency with Divine Nature

He asserted that "fear, anger, and favor are incompatible with the perfect blessedness and incorruptibility of the gods."

To attribute such emotions or worldly control to them would imply toil and weakness—alien to their serene existence.

2. Origin of Fear in Ignorance

Fear of the gods arises primarily from human ignorance of natural causes. Celestial events like thunder, lightning, comets, and eclipses—or terrestrial disasters like floods and failed harvests—were mistakenly attributed to divine wrath. Epicurus believed that scientific understanding of these phenomena dispels this superstitious dread.

3. Detrimental to Human Happiness

Fear of the gods is one of the chief causes of mental disturbance (tarachē), preventing individuals from achieving ataraxia (peace of mind) and aponia (freedom from pain)—the ultimate goals of Epicurean philosophy. Such fear leads to anxiety, superstition, and a life of constant appeasement that obstructs true happiness.

4. Emphasis on Human Agency and Free Will

Epicurus stressed that human actions are largely within our control and subject to praise or blame—not predetermined by divine will or fate. Belief in divine interference undermines free will and leads to a “slavery to necessity.”

In this fictional story, Epicurus wanted the man to understand that the gods require no material offerings—only respect. Perhaps the man realized his sons needed those gifts more than the temple did.

In reality, Epicurus did participate in religious offerings, even though it contradicted his views on divine indifference. He did so for pragmatic reasons.

Epicurus held a nuanced stance on religious practices:

1. Public Participation: Despite his beliefs, Epicurus advised his followers to take part in public rituals “reverently and properly.” This was a strategic move to avoid accusations of impiety, especially in a society where philosophers like Socrates had been persecuted.

2. Reinterpreting Rituals: Epicurus didn’t see rituals as divine transactions. Instead, he believed they could help the mind receive “simulacra” of the gods—mental images that inspired tranquility. Prayer, for Epicureans, was a form of communion, not a request for intervention. He revered the gods for their excellence, not their power.

3. Community Offerings: Within his school, Epicurus organized voluntary contributions to sustain the Garden. His will included provisions for offerings in honor of deceased loved ones. Monthly gatherings and birthday celebrations featured symbolic “offerings” and philosophical banquets, fostering fellowship and reflection.

4. Limits of Prayer: Epicurus taught that it was “idle to seek from the gods what a man is capable of providing for himself.” While one might reflect on life’s duration, true peace of mind must be earned through reason and self-awareness.

Summary

Epicurus's theology sought to rationalize the existence of gods in a way that freed humanity from religious terror, allowing individuals to pursue a tranquil and happy life based on understanding nature and mastering their desires and fears.

Against the Fear of Death

Epicurus's mission was to remove all fear from human life. In the previous chapter, he addressed the fear of the gods—not by denying their existence, but by reframing them. He was pragmatic: he attended temples and even gave offerings, not out of belief in divine intervention, but to preserve peace and avoid conflict.

When it came to death, however, Epicurus offered no comfort through illusion. He did not flatter or console with hopeful myths. He insisted that death is the end of life and awareness—a state of nothingness, where the body dissolves into atoms and the soul, along with consciousness, ceases to exist.

Before Epicurus: Democritus and the Fear of Death

Long before Epicurus, Democritus addressed the fear of death in his work On Hades, where he examined stories of people who claimed to return from the dead and described visions of the afterlife.

He explicitly challenged these tales, exposing the falsehoods behind popular beliefs about postmortem suffering.

Popular Beliefs and Fears

Many feared eternal torment, as depicted in myths, or the annihilation of sensation, believing death would somehow still affect them.

During Lucretius's time, fear of future punishment shaped religious thought among both the common people and the elite.

Imagery of the Underworld

- Tartarus and Acheron: These realms were imagined as fiery pits and dark abysses, filled with dread and torment.

- Cerberus and the Furies: Mythical guardians of Hell, embodying the terror of divine punishment.

- Rivers of Death: Rivers like Pyriphlegethon were part of the grim journey through the underworld, steeped in darkness and despair.

Cultural Reinforcement

- Legends and Myths: Tales of suffering in the afterlife were widespread and deeply embedded in cultural storytelling.

- Popular Dramas: Stage plays portrayed vivid scenes of torture, monstrous figures, and emotional agony

entertainment that reinforced fear and superstition.

Epicurus on Death: Letters and Final Reflections

Epicurus viewed death not as something to fear, but as a natural boundary of life, one that, properly understood, could liberate the mind from anxiety.

His writings, especially in his letters, reveal a consistent and courageous philosophy:

1. Death Is Nothing to Us

"A right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality.

For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living."

Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

This foundational statement reframes death not as a threat, but as a release from craving.

Once we accept that non-existence holds no pain, we can enjoy life without fear.

2. The Logic of Non-Existence

“So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist.

It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and for the latter are no more.”

—Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

Epicurus dismantles the fear of death with simple logic: we never experience death itself. It is not a state of suffering, but the absence of experience.

3. Joy in the Face of Pain

“On this truly happy day of my life, as I am at the point of death, I write this to you.

The disease in my bladder and stomach are pursuing their course, lacking nothing of their natural severity: but against all this is the joy in my heart at the recollection of my conversations with you.”

—Epicurus, in a letter to Idomeneus (quoted in Diogenes Laertius)

Even in agony, Epicurus found joy, not in denial, but in memory and friendship. His philosophy was not just theoretical; it was lived.

4. Final Moments and Farewell

“Farewell, remember my sayings.”

Thus spoke Epicurus at his death.

These were his last words, spoken aloud to his friends.

Then in a hot bath he laid himself, demanded a goblet of wine, quaffed it, and soon quaffed the cold air of Hades below.

—Epigram from Vita Epicuri

This poetic account of his death shows Epicurus facing the end with dignity, clarity, and even ritual—no fear, no pleading, just farewell.

5. Practical Concerns in Final Days

“Seven days before writing this the stoppage became complete and I suffered pains such as bringing men to their last day.

If anything happens to me, do you look after the children of Metrodorus for four or five years, but do not spend any more on them than you now spend each year on me.”

—Epicurus, in a final letter

Even in his last days, Epicurus remained practical and thoughtful, caring for others and maintaining his principles.

6. A Letter to His Mother

“Think of us, Mother, as living among such blessings as these and rejoicing always…

Be sparing, however, of the parcels you persist in sending us, for it is not my wish that you should lack anything in order that I may have an abundance.”

—Epicurus, in a letter to his mother (quoted in Diogenes of Oenoanda)

This tender note shows Epicurus’s humility and care, even as he lived simply and taught others to do the same.

7. The Final Truth

“We are born once and we cannot be born twice, but for all time must be no more; and you, thou fool, though not master of the morrow, postpone the hour—and each and every one of us goes to death with excuses on our lips.”

Epicurus reminds us that procrastination is futile. Death is inevitable, and fearing it only robs us of life

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Epicurus vs. Religious Views on Death and the Afterlife

Epicurus taught that death is a complete cessation of sensation and awareness.

He believed that fearing death was irrational, since we never actually experience it.

This view was rooted in his materialist philosophy: the soul is made of atoms, and when the body dies, the soul dissolves.

There is no punishment, no reward, no consciousness, only nonexistence.

This sharply contrasts with the eschatological beliefs found in major religious traditions:

Islam

Islam teaches that after death, the soul enters Barzakh, a waiting period before the Day of Judgment.

The righteous are rewarded, while sinners face torment.

The Qur'an describes Hell (Jahannam) as a blazing furnace, with vivid imagery of fire, boiling water, and chains.

The fear of divine punishment is central to moral accountability.

Christianity

Christianity also emphasizes eternal consequences.

The New Testament speaks of Heaven as eternal communion with God, and Hell as a place of torment, often described as a lake of fire.

The idea of divine judgment and everlasting punishment became a cornerstone of Christian theology, especially in medieval interpretations.

Judaism

Judaism's view of the afterlife is more ambiguous.

The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) mentions Sheol, a shadowy realm of the dead, but without clear notions of reward or punishment.

Later Jewish texts and traditions introduced concepts like Gehinnom, a temporary purgatory-like state, but the idea of eternal hell is less defined and varies widely among Jewish thinkers.

Epicurus's Radical Alternative

Epicurus rejected all of this. He saw myths of punishment after death as tools of manipulation that were used by priests, rulers, and dramatists to instill fear and control behavior.

His goal was ataraxia (peace of mind), and he believed that freeing people from the fear of death was essential to achieving it.

"So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us… when death comes, we do not exist."

—Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus

Epicurus's Memoirs

While on my way to visit my aged mother, I saw Euthydemos—an old friend I hadn't seen in a long time. He had visited my garden a few times in the past, but stopped coming after he moved to another city.

"Greetings, Euthydemos," I said warmly. "You look as handsome as ever, though your hair has grown whiter."

He reached out and clasped my hand.

With a heavy voice, he replied, "Fate has not been kind to me lately. My two sons died in a shipwreck."

I was stunned. I remembered them well—beautiful boys, like gods. They had once come with him to my garden.

"I'm truly sorry to hear that, my friend."

He wiped his hand across his face, as if trying to brush away the weight of grief.

"They were everything to me," he said quietly. "Now I miss them terribly. I worry about their souls... about what happens after death. I wish I had died in their place."

I was surprised to hear him speak this way. I had hoped he'd learned something from his time in my garden.

I spoke seriously. “Euthydemos, death is the end of awareness. They are now in nothingness—just as they were before birth. Don’t speak like a fool.”

He stared at me. “You deny the gods, Epicurus.”

I smiled gently. “No, I don’t deny them. But the gods I believe in are not the ones of religion. If they truly cared, why didn’t they save your sons? Children die from disease, war, and accidents—where are the gods then? They exist, yes, but they are indifferent to us. Your sons died a good death.”

He looked at me, and I saw something shift in his face—perhaps relief. Maybe it helped to know that his children were not alone in death, and that many suffer worse fates.

I invited him to visit my garden again when he was free, then bid him farewell. My mother was waiting for me.

Atomic Theory in Epicurean Philosophy

For Epicurus, atomic theory was not merely an academic exercise, it was the foundation for cultivating the right mindset and achieving the ethical goal of a tranquil and happy life. Understanding atoms was essential to living “the good life,” because it addressed the root causes of human fear, confusion, and suffering.

Fundamental Components of Reality

Epicurus taught that the universe consists of two things: solid bodies and void (empty space).

- The solid bodies are atoms—indivisible, eternal, and indestructible particles.

- He argued that if matter could be infinitely divided, it would eventually be annihilated. Therefore, atoms must exist as the ultimate building blocks of reality.

The word atom itself means “indivisible.” These particles are described as:

- “Hard bodies free from any admixture of void”

- “Solid, massy, hard, impenetrable particles”

Their solid singleness gives them strength, allowing them to form countless combinations without being worn away.

Primary Properties of Atoms

Atoms possess only three intrinsic properties:

- Shape: Atoms come in a vast variety of shapes—smooth, hooked, angular—which account for the diversity of perceptible things. While the number of shapes is immense, it is not infinite. However, for each shape, there is an infinite number of atoms.

- Size: Atoms vary in size but are never infinitely small. They are far below the threshold of human perception, yet not so large as to be visible.

- Weight: All atoms have weight, which causes their primary motion.

Importantly, atoms do not possess secondary qualities like color, sound, smell, warmth, or consciousness. These emerge only when atoms combine to form larger, perceptible bodies.

Epicurus viewed atoms as “dead matter,” and the challenge was to explain how sensation and consciousness arise from these non-sentient particles.

Constant Motion and the Swerve

Atoms are always in motion:

- In the void, they fall straight downward due to their weight, moving at equal and incredibly fast speeds—“quick as thought.”

- Epicurus rejected Aristotle’s view that heavier bodies fall faster; in a vacuum, all atoms fall at the same rate.

When atoms form compound bodies, they continue their internal vibration.

A unique Epicurean concept is the swerve (clinamen):

- Atoms can spontaneously and slightly deviate from their path at uncertain times and places.

- Without this swerve, atoms falling in parallel lines would never collide—thus, nothing could ever be formed.

This swerve is crucial for explaining the formation of matter and for introducing free will into a universe otherwise governed by deterministic laws.

Understanding the Universe and Human Life

Epicurus used atomic theory to explain both the natural world and the human condition:

- Formation of Worlds: The random motion and collisions of atoms, aided by the swerve, lead to the formation of compound bodies and infinite worlds—some like ours, some entirely different.

- Dispelling Fear of the Gods: Epicurus taught that if gods exist, they are made of fine atoms and reside in the intermundia (spaces between worlds).

They do not interfere in human affairs.

This understanding removes fear of divine punishment or intervention.

- Dispelling Fear of Death: The soul, too, is made of fine atoms dispersed throughout the body. At death, these atoms scatter, and sensation ceases. ”

- Freedom of Will: The atomic swerve breaks the chain of strict causation, allowing for human freedom and moral responsibility.

Learning About Atoms: A Moral Imperative

Epicurus developed a systematic teaching method:

- He began with epitomes (condensed summaries), such as the Letter to Herodotus, which laid out the most general principles.

- His pedagogy moved from general to particular, using the Twelve Elementary Principles of physics. Chief among them:

“The universe consists of solid bodies and void.”

For Epicurus, atomic theory was not just scientific—it was ethical and liberating. It offered a rational explanation of the world, freed the mind from superstition, and laid the groundwork for ataraxia, peace of mind.

Epicurus’s Memoirs: My Debate with Cleanthes

I recall the day with clarity. The air was still, the Garden quiet, save for the rustle of olive leaves. Cleanthes, the Stoic, had come to speak, not with hostility, but with the solemn conviction of one who believed the universe was ruled by divine reason.

He sat across from me, his eyes steady, his voice composed.

His face bore the marks of a gladiator and his body was strong, shaped by years of wrestling. No wonder he had once been a champion.

He asked, his tone sharp with restrained anger,

“Do you deny Providence, Epicurus?”

I replied gently,

“Yes, I do. I’ve never seen any proof of Providence, outside the pages of your books.”

He smiled, but it was the smile of a man preparing to strike.

“Then how do you believe in Zeus? If Zeus is good, then surely the universe, born of his nature, must also be good. The highest good produces only good.”

I tried to be diplomatic, but truth pulled me forward.

“The gods are blessed and indifferent. Yes, they are good—but they did not create the universe. Everything is made of atoms. Even the gods. Nature is neither good nor evil—it is neutral, indifferent, just as the gods are.”

He frowned, clearly annoyed.

“And what proof do you have for this claim?”

I answered,

“Even a blind man can see the amount of evil in the world. If Providence truly ruled, would it permit such suffering?”

Cleanthes paused, then said,

“Everything you call evil leads to a higher good. Pain refines the soul. Tragedy teaches virtue.”

I leaned forward.

“Tell me, Cleanthes—when a tyrant burns an entire village, killing every soul within it—could Providence not have chosen a gentler path to the same good? Must the road to virtue be paved with ashes?”

He shook his head.

“So your gods are atoms, Epicurus? Life without meaning. Just chaos and randomness.”

I replied firmly,

“No. Atoms are not gods. They are the key to understanding the universe—not fearing it. The swerve is not chaos—it is freedom. It allows us to change our fate, to choose, to act.”

He was unmoved. His love for Zeus ran deeper than reason could reach. We ate dinner together in silence, and when the stars rose, he left the Garden.

Atoms, the Body, and the Birth of Awareness

The idea of atoms is no longer mere philosophical speculation—it has become a cornerstone of modern science. From quantum mechanics to neuroscience, the material nature of the universe is affirmed time and again.

Epicurus’s insight that everything, including sensation and thought, is composed of physical particles anticipated discoveries that would emerge centuries later.

Today, neuroscience confirms that consciousness arises from the brain, a corporeal structure composed of billions of neurons and trillions of synaptic connections. Awareness is not a disembodied form, it is the product of dynamic interactions between physical systems. Studies show that regions like the prefrontal cortex, thalamus, and reticular activating system are essential for generating alertness, perception, and self-awareness.

Without a functioning body, particularly a functioning brain, awareness ceases. This supports Epicurus’s view that the soul is material, and that sensation ends when its atomic structure dissolves.

Although modern physics no longer accepts the classical notion of void—replacing it with quantum fields and the fabric of spacetime—it continues to affirm that matter behaves according to physical laws, not divine intention.

Epicurus’s atoms may differ from the particles described in contemporary physics, but his core idea remains strikingly relevant: the universe is neither moral nor purposeful—it is neutral.

And by understanding its nature, we free ourselves from superstition, fear, and the illusion of cosmic judgment.

Epicurus on Pleasure

A Philosophy of Tranquility, Not Indulgence

There is widespread misunderstanding about Epicurus's conception of pleasure.

Many imagine his Garden as a place of excess, filled with sex, wine, expensive food, and orgies. In reality, Epicurus's philosophy was far more restrained and thoughtful.

His idea of pleasure can be best understood through three dimensions: negative, simple, and active, all aimed at cultivating a tranquil and happy life, not unbridled indulgence.

1. Negative Pleasure: Freedom from Pain and Trouble

Epicurus believed that once this condition is achieved, the "tempest of the soul is dispersed," and the individual feels no further need to perfect the soul or body.

This view contrasts sharply with the Cyrenaic school, which valued only kinetic pleasures, those involving motion or excitement—and dismissed the absence of pain as neutral.

Epicurus, however, saw static pleasures, freedom from pain and mental disturbance—as the foundation of lasting happiness.

He acknowledged active pleasures like joy and exultation, but emphasized that they must arise from a stable, undisturbed state.

Central to achieving this negative pleasure is the removal of fear, especially fear of the gods and fear of death.

Epicurus taught that death is "nothing to us," because it is the deprivation of sensation, and what lacks sensation cannot harm us. Understanding this eliminates the craving for immortality and allows us to enjoy mortal life.

Similarly, a proper understanding of the gods reveals them as blessed and incorruptible beings who do not interfere in human affairs, dispelling fear of divine punishment or favor.

2. Simple Pleasure: Contentment with Natural Needs

Epicurus advocated a simple lifestyle, believing it sufficient for true happiness. He lived almost ascetically, content with bread and water, and encouraged his disciples to satisfy only natural and necessary desires: health, food, drink, clothing, and shelter.

These are easy to obtain and bring no harm.

He explicitly distinguished these from luxurious or sensual pleasures, which he argued lead to disease, anxiety, and regret. As he wrote:

"Plain-tasting foods bring a pleasure equal to that of a luxurious diet once the pain of need has been removed."

The gratification of genuine hunger and thirst provides maximum pleasure, which cannot be surpassed by artificial stimulation.

This reflects the idea of natural ceilings of pleasure, beyond which pleasure cannot be increased, only varied.

Epicurus advised:

"If you wish to make Pythocles happy, add not to his riches, but take away from his desires."

For him, contentment with little was a cornerstone of happiness:

"Poverty, when measured by the natural purpose of life, is great wealth."

3. Active Pleasure: Enrichment Within Tranquility

While static pleasure is the foundation, Epicurus also valued active pleasures, those involving motion and emotional engagement. He wrote:

"Joy and exultation are considered as active pleasures involving motion."

These pleasures enrich life but must be pursued wisely. Examples include:

- Philosophical study: Pleasure arises from understanding and insight.

- Escape from calamity: The joy of surviving danger is intense and memorable.

- Memory of past joys: Recalling a well-spent life renews the spirit.

- Public spectacles: The wise man may enjoy them with moderation.

- Friendship: A source of the "purest pleasure," both practical and emotional.

"Friendship goes dancing round the world, proclaiming to us all to awake to the praises of a happy life."

Epicurus emphasized the “calculus of advantage”weighing pleasures and pains to choose the path that brings the most lasting happiness. Sometimes, short-term pain may be chosen for greater long-term pleasure.

By integrating these three dimensions—negative pleasure (freedom from disturbance), simple pleasure (natural satisfaction), and active pleasure (enriching experiences)—Epicurus constructed a nuanced philosophy of happiness.

Far from advocating indulgence, he offered a path to peace, clarity, and fulfillment, grounded in reason and nature.,

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Personal Reflection: Living with Gout, Living with Gratitude

Gout has kept me from my favorite hobby, working out. During flare-ups, I feel the absence keenly.

But when the pain subsides, even temporarily, I find myself enjoying life more deeply.

I go to the garden, move my body, eat foods that suit my condition—and I do it all with greater gratitude.

I’ve come to understand what Epicurus meant by aponia—the pleasure of being free from pain.

It’s not just the absence of suffering; it’s a kind of joy in itself. When the body is calm, even simple things feel profound. I don’t chase indulgence.

I savor simplicity. And in those quiet, pain-free moments, I feel closer to the tranquility Epicurus taught

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Epicurus’s Memoirs : Opinion is not reality.

When I was in my garden, sharing a simple meal with my friends, our student and slave, Mus, approached me. He told me that a young man wished to meet with me privately.

I stopped eating and said, "Let him come in."

The young man introduced himself as a student of Nausiphanes, my rival.

He explained that he had come to see me with his own eyes, to determine if his teacher's claims about me were true or false.

I didn't ask his name. Instead, I gestured for him to sit with us. One of my friends made space, and the skinny young man took a seat beside me.

"What has Nausiphanes claimed about me?" I asked.

"He says you are arrogant and vain," he replied. "He claims you advise your followers to indulge in excessive pleasure, sex, and wine—that your teachings are immoral."

I smiled. "My son, you claim to be a seeker of truth. So, tell me, what do you see here?"

"My name is Orion," he answered. "I see nothing of what Nausiphanes said. I see you and your friends eating simple food—bread, honey, and cheese. The other people in the Garden are engaged in philosophical discussion. I've also noticed that slaves and women are here, sitting alongside nobles without any difference."

I gently clapped my hands. "You are a much better judge of character than your teacher."

I confessed to him that I was once a student just like him, studying with Nausiphanes, a follower of the atomist philosopher Democritus. "But he was a vain man who treated others poorly.

In a moment of anger, I lashed out and called him 'the illiterate.' Our relationship ended then, and ever since, he has attacked me and spread lies."

The young man, Orion, saw the truth for himself. He realized his teacher had been a liar, so he joined my school and adopted my philosophy. He was a good follower

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Epicurus's philosophy was widely misunderstood because of the insults spread by his rivals from other philosophical schools.

While these attacks were often a reaction to Epicurus's own bold and harsh criticisms of their teachings, the slanders mischaracterized his philosophy entirely.

In fact, Epicurus's school, "The Garden," was radically egalitarian for its time. It welcomed women, foreigners, and slaves—groups that were almost always excluded from philosophical discussions.

Unlike figures such as Aristotle, who believed some people were "natural slaves,"

Epicurus taught that freedom from fear and pain was a universal goal for all, regardless of social status. And happiness mainly consists of simple pleasure.

A perfect example comes from a later account: a slave named Licinus escaped from his Roman master and stayed with the Epicurean Patron in Athens for several months, living as if he were a free man.

This story, recorded by Cicero, demonstrates how the Epicureans extended hospitality and philosophical fellowship to everyone, even those considered to be at the very bottom of society.

On Pain

The Endurance of Hard Times Epicurus and his followers offered a unique perspective on enduring suffering and hardship.

Their philosophy emphasized mental fortitude, a clear understanding of life's limits, and a rational view of pain..

The goal was to free individuals from the greatest disturbances of the mind—especially fear of the gods, eternal misery, and death.

Understanding the Nature and Limits of Pain

Epicurus taught that pain is inherently limited, and therefore, more endurable than people often assume. He wrote:

"Pain does not last continuously in the flesh."

- Acute pain, he argued, is intense but brief.

- Chronic pain, while longer-lasting, allows for moments of pleasure and is rarely unbearable.

- He stated:

"Great pains quickly put an end to life; long-enduring pains are not severe."

This framework suggests that no pain is perpetual or insurmountable, making its endurance logically and emotionally feasible.

Mental Resilience in Suffering

Epicurus believed that mental clarity and freedom from fear could preserve happiness even in physical distress. One striking example is the Epicurean claim:

"Even if the wise man is put on the rack, he is happy."

This doesn't mean the wise man enjoys pain, but that his state of ataraxia—peace of mind—remains intact.

Epicurus himself demonstrated this in his final days, suffering from strangury and dysentery:

"The cheerfulness of my mind, arising from the memory of our past discussions, counteracts all this."

This shows how mental joy and philosophical reflection can override physical suffering, allowing even the hardest trials to be endured with dignity.

Poverty and the Simple Life

Epicurus advocated for a simple lifestyle as a path to independence and resilience. He taught that:

"Poverty, when measured by the natural purpose of life, is great wealth; but unlimited wealth is great poverty."

By accustoming oneself to plain and necessary pleasures, such as bread and water, one becomes fearless of fortune and less vulnerable to suffering caused by unmet desires.

"Plain foods bring pleasure equal to luxurious ones once the pain of need is removed."

This philosophy teaches that contentment with little eliminates much of the suffering rooted in excess and craving.

Control Over Desires and Fears

Epicurus emphasized that unhappiness stems from internal states, especially fear and uncontrolled desire. These can be mastered through reason and prudence:

"By curbing vain and unbridled desire, a man can win for himself the blessedness of understanding."

Prudence, he said, is:

"The beginning and the greatest good."

The wise man laughs at fate, believing:

"With us lies the chief power in determining events."

This proactive mindset allows one to face life's challenges with serenity and strength.

Transforming Hardship Through Philosophy

Epicurus's teachings show that pain and hardship are not to be feared, but understood.

Through reason, simplicity, and mental clarity, even the most difficult experiences can be transformed into manageable—or even negligible—parts of life.

Epicurus's Final Reflections

In my final days, I endured intense physical suffering, yet I maintained a state of deep happiness through my philosophical convictions and the sustaining power of memory.

I suffered from a stone in the bladder (strangury) and dysentery.

Seven days before writing my last letter, my condition became severe, bringing pains "such as bringing men to their last day."

I described these diseases as "pursuing their course, lacking nothing of their natural severity," and noted that my sufferings were so extreme that "nothing can be added to their violence."

Yet, despite this excruciating agony, my spirit was filled with profound contentment and joy.

On what I called “this truly happy day of my life, as I am at the point of death,” I wrote to Idomeneus—a letter intended for my friends in Lampsacus.

In it, I declared: “Against all these pains is the joy in my heart at the recollection of my conversations with you.”

I consoled myself with the thought that “all these afflictions are combated and counteracted by the cheerfulness of mind which comes from the memory of our past discussions.”

Thus, even the severest bodily pain can be exceeded and overcome by mental pleasure.

My last words stand as a testament to the triumph of happiness over suffering.

I embodied the principle of “subtracting pain from pleasure, leaving a balance of pleasure—which is happiness.”

The joy I drew from the grateful recollection of my disciples’ contributions and our shared philosophical discussions outweighed even the most violent of my physical pains.

The Calculus of Advantage

Epicurus’s Method for Living Wisely

Pleasure with Precision

Epicurus’s ethical system is often misunderstood as a call to indulgence. In truth, it is a call to discernment. At the heart of his philosophy lies a methodical tool for decision-making: the Calculus of Advantage, also known as the Hedonistic Calculus.

This framework is not about chasing every pleasure, it’s about choosing wisely, with the goal of maximizing long-term happiness and minimizing pain.

Core Principles and Mechanisms

Measuring and Balancing

Epicurus taught that we must weigh pleasures and pains against each other, scrutinizing their consequences. The process is subtractive: we subtract pain from pleasure to determine the net benefit.

Example:

A man is invited to a lavish banquet. He knows the food will be rich and delicious, but he also knows he tends to overeat and suffer stomach pain afterward. Using the calculus, he declines the invitation, choosing a simple meal at home that brings pleasure without pain.

Consequences and Foresight

Epicurus urged us to ask:

"What will be the result for me if the object of this desire is attained—and what if it is not?"

Example:

A woman considers taking a high-paying job that requires constant travel and long hours. She foresees financial gain but also loneliness, stress, and loss of time with family. She chooses a lower-paying job with a balanced lifestyle, prioritizing peace over profit.

Sober Reasoning (Phronesis)

This is practical wisdom, the ability to investigate the reasons behind every choice and avoidance.

Example:

A young man is tempted to retaliate against someone who insulted him. But through sober reasoning, he realizes that revenge will only prolong his anger and disturb his peace. He lets it go, preserving his mental tranquility.

Control of Experience

The calculus empowers individuals to retain control over their experience, cultivating freedom from external pressures.

Example:

A student feels pressured to pursue a prestigious degree for status. But she reflects and chooses a field she genuinely enjoys, knowing it will bring lasting satisfaction rather than fleeting approval.

Application in Epicurean Life

Desire Management

Epicurus classified desires into three types. The calculus helps determine which to satisfy and which to reject.

Example:

A man craves expensive wine but realizes that simple water quenches his thirst and brings equal pleasure once the pain of thirst is gone. He chooses simplicity, avoiding the stress of luxury.

Continuous Pleasure

Epicurus taught that pleasure can be continuous when pain and disturbance are absent.

Example:

A retired woman lives modestly, tending her garden, reading, and enjoying quiet evenings with friends. She experiences stable pleasure—not from constant excitement, but from the absence of discomfort and the presence of peace.

Enduring Pain for Greater Good

Sometimes short-term pain leads to long-term pleasure.

Example:

A man undergoes dental surgery. The procedure is painful, but he endures it knowing it will relieve chronic discomfort and restore his ability to enjoy food and conversation.

Self-Sufficiency (Autarkeia)

Contentment with little leads to freedom.

Example:

A traveler learns to enjoy simple meals and basic shelter. When luxury is unavailable, he remains cheerful. When it is available, he enjoys it more deeply, having learned not to depend on it.

Virtue and Justice

Virtue is chosen for the sake of pleasure—not as an abstract ideal.

Example:

A merchant chooses to deal honestly, even when deception could bring short-term gain. He knows that justice brings peace of mind, trust from others, and long-term happiness.

Distinction from Misunderstandings

Calculus is not a license for excess. Epicurus warned that indulgence often leads to pain.

Example:

A man binge drinks at a party. The next day, he suffers a hangover and regrets his choices. Epicurean wisdom would have advised moderation, preserving pleasure without consequence.

Critics misquoted Epicureans, such as Metrodorus's remark about "the pleasure of the stomach." In context, this referred to the unity of bodily and mental pleasure, not crude indulgence.

Pleasure as Wisdom

Epicurus's Calculus of Advantage is a method for living deliberately.

It teaches us to pause, reflect, and choose the path that leads to lasting peace. In a world of instant gratification and emotional chaos, this ancient tool remains strikingly modern.

To live well is to choose well. And to choose well is to think clearly—subtracting pain, adding joy, and walking the path of tranquil pleasure.

Misconceptions about Epicurus

Epicureanism was frequently misrepresented as a philosophy that promoted sensual indulgence.

However, Epicurus himself lived an almost ascetic life, content with basic food and water. His doctrines emphasized moderation and the "higher pleasure of a simple life."

While his frankness in naming pleasure as the ultimate goal and grounding friendship in mutual advantage led to charges of egoistic hedonism, his missionary zeal to bring happiness to all people, including the poor and ignorant, suggests an altruistic hedonism.

He consistently stressed the importance of self-command and guarding against passions that could disrupt inner peace.

This pursuit of pleasure is not one of fleeting sensual indulgence, but a profound and carefully calculated state of tranquility of mind (ataraxia) and freedom from bodily pain (aponia).

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1. Pleasure as the Sole End and Criterion

Foundation in Experience:

Epicurus argued that all living creatures naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain from birth, making pleasure the inherent and universal "beginning and end of the blessed life." This is an experiential fact, not an abstract ideal or moral obligation.

Sensation as Criterion:

Just as sensation is the infallible criterion of truth in physics, the feelings (pathē) of pleasure and pain are the immediate and direct indicators of good and bad in the moral realm.

Kinetic vs. Static Pleasure: or Active vs Negative.

Epicurus distinguished between two types of pleasure:

- Kinetic pleasure – the pleasure of movement or active gratification of desire (e.g., eating when hungry). These are considered "impure," as they are often accompanied or followed by pain and the desire for renewal.

The Hedonistic Calculus:

True pleasure requires careful calculation. One must choose pleasures that do not lead to greater discomfort and be willing to endure pains if they result in greater, more lasting pleasure.

This continuous, long-term view of life distinguishes Epicurus from the Cyrenaics, who focused on momentary pleasure. The limit of pleasure is reached as soon as pain due to want is removed; further additions only diversify, not increase, true pleasure.

2. The Blessed Life and Overcoming Fear

The blessed life is characterized by health of the body and tranquility of the mind. This state is attainable by anyone, regardless of wealth or status, since “the wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured.”

Role of the Mind:

While all pleasure originates in the flesh, the mind plays a crucial role in mitigating present distress by recalling past pleasures and anticipating future ones.

This power of projection gives the mind greater control over emotions than the body has over its sensations.

Dissipating Fears:

A primary condition for mental tranquility is freedom from the two greatest fears:

- Fear of the gods: Men must understand that the gods are blessed, immortal beings who do not interfere in human affairs or the workings of the world. This knowledge frees the mind from dread of divine retribution or arbitrary intervention.

- Fear of death: Death is the complete cessation of sensation and consciousness, and therefore “nothing to us.” It cannot cause pain because sensation ends with life; anticipation of it is groundless.

Importance of Natural Science (Physiologia):

To achieve lasting tranquility, one must understand the nature of the universe. Natural science is the “handmaid” to ethics, dispelling mythical stories and the fear of gods and death by demonstrating that the world operates by natural laws rather than divine will.

3. Virtues as Means to Pleasure

For Epicurus, virtues such as temperance, courage, and justice are not ends in themselves but instrumental to achieving pleasure. They are chosen “for the sake of pleasure,” just as medicine is chosen for health.

Prudence (Phronesis):

Considered the “supreme possession of life,” prudence enables a person to make right judgments in choosing and avoiding actions to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. It teaches that “it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honourably, and justly.”

Temperance:

Chosen because it brings peace of mind and contributes to the perfect pleasure of tranquility by avoiding excessive and unnecessary desires.

Courage:

Involves choosing pains to avoid greater pains. The Epicurean has a strong motive for courage, understanding that the greatest pains are short-lived or ended by death, and lesser pains have intervals of rest.

Justice:

Not derived from a natural moral instinct, but from a social contract based on mutual advantage. Men agree “not to harm or be harmed” to secure freedom from fear of others, which would otherwise disrupt mental peace. Injustice itself is not inherently evil; the real harm lies in the fear of being detected and punished.

4. Social Relations

Public Life:

The wise man avoids public life, power, and ambition, as these are sources of “injury and disturbance to blessedness” and create anxieties. True happiness lies in living “unnoticed.”

Friendship:

Highly valued as “by far the greatest” means to the blessed life. While initially motivated by the practical need for safety and mutual advantage, friendship can evolve into a deeper, unselfish enjoyment for its own sake. Epicurus held that “it is more pleasant to do good than to receive it.”

Love:

Passionate love is condemned as an “idle desire” that causes “goading restlessness” and disturbs peace of mind.

Family Life:

Marriage and having children are generally discouraged due to the “many unpleasantnesses and distractions” they bring from more serious philosophical pursuits, though Epicurus showed personal affection for children.

5. Overall Character and Criticisms

Epicureanism is an uncompromising egoistic hedonism — the individual’s pleasure is the sole motive. It was often misinterpreted as pure sensualism, leading to the derogatory use of the term “Epicurean.” Epicurus strongly refuted this, emphasizing inner tranquility over bodily indulgence.

While ascetic in practice (e.g., simple diet, avoidance of luxury), its motivation is fundamentally hedonistic — aiming for maximum

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Epicurus’s Memoirs : Short meeting with Damon the skeptic

In a shaded corner of The Garden, the air was warm, carrying the scent of figs and thyme.

A man in a worn cloak sat slouched on a bench, staring at the ground. I approached.

Damon was a skeptical young Roman who came to study philosophy in Athens.

He did not trust his senses and held a bleak view of life.

He began:

“Epicurus, you speak of pleasure and peace, but I see nothing certain. The senses deceive.

The mind wanders. Life has no meaning. Why should I not cast myself away from the rest of it?”

I sat beside him and replied:

“You say the senses deceive, yet it is through them you know you are here, speaking to me.

Without them, what would you trust? A man who denies his eyes and ears is like a sailor who smashes his compass, then curses the sea for being trackless.”

Damon said:

“But even if I could trust them, what is the point? It all ends in death. All is swallowed by time.”

I answered:

“Death is nothing to us. When we are, death is not; when death is, we are not. You fear a shadow that can never touch you.

The point is not to live forever, but to live without fear while you are here.”

Damon frowned.

“And yet, the world is full of pain.”

I smiled.

“If you do not trust your senses, how can you know the world is full of pain? And why wait at all, if you are so eager to pass through the Gate of Hades?”

Then I added:

“Pain is either sharp and brief, or long and mild. The sharp soon passes; the long can be borne with the help of friends, the memory of past joys, and the hope of future ones. Even in illness, I have found moments of sweetness, a sip of cool water, the laughter of a companion.”

Damon said quietly:

“You make it sound easy.”

I replied in the voice of a teacher:

“It is not easy — it is simple. Trust the evidence of your senses.

Seek what brings peace to body and mind. Avoid what disturbs them. Fill your days with friendship, honest thought, and the modest pleasures nature requires. In this, life finds its meaning.”

After a pause, Damon said:

“Perhaps… I will stay a little longer.”

I smiled and replied:

“Stay, and walk in the garden. You may find that the meaning you seek is not hidden in the stars, but in the shade of these trees, in the bread we share, and in the company of those who wish you well. But be sure to trust your senses, before you lose them.”

Epicurus on Morality and the Reliability of the Senses

Epicurus held a strong and consistent position on the reliability of the senses, sharply criticizing those who distrusted or rejected sensory evidence.

For him, sensation was a fundamental test of truth and the ultimate basis of his entire philosophical system. He regarded the senses as direct points of contact between human beings and physical reality.,

Epicurus asserted that sensations are infallible; their evidence must always be accepted immediately when available. As he emphasized,

“the sensations are always true”

forming the bedrock of both his physical and moral teachings.

He explicitly criticized the wholesale rejection of sensory input, stating:

“If you reject all sensations, you will have no standard by which to judge even those which you say are false.”

This implies that without the senses, there is no basis for any judgment — not even to claim that something is false.

Epicurus also warned against rejecting even a single sensation:

"If you reject any single sensation... you will confuse all other sensations as well by your groundless opinion, so that you will lose all standard of judgment."

Similarly:

"If you reject any single sensation, you will produce confusion in them all, and so destroy the possibility of a standard of judgment."

In a powerful statement, he conveyed the unavoidable nature of sensory evidence:

"To doubt that which is evident is not in our power. To believe that which is not evident is equally impossible to us."

Epicurus clarified that error arises not from sensation itself, but from the mind's interpretation:

Sensus non mentitur sed opinio; sensus enim patitur, non opinatur

"Sense does not lie, but opinion; for sense experiences, it does not opine."

He wrote that "Sensation is entirely irrational" which he considered a virtue, because an irrational faculty cannot err by interpretation; it merely registers a stimulus.

Therefore, it is not in sensation but in human intelligence that error arises. This error he termed "the addition of opinion."

He further argued against the possibility of refuting sensations:

"Nor does anything exist that can refute the sensations, for neither can a sensation in a given class refute the sensation in the same class, because they are of equal validity, nor can the sensation in a given class refute the sensation in another class, because they are not criteria of the same phenomena."

Epicurus linked all ideas to sensation, noting:

"For all accessory ideas () are derived from the sensations by virtue of coincidence, analogy, similarity, and combination, reason also contributing something."

Critique of Pessimism and the "Black View of Life"

Epicurus also criticized those with a pessimistic outlook on life, challenging their views with direct and pointed questions.

He admonished individuals who expressed a desire never to have been born, or to hasten death, suggesting that if their conviction was genuine, they should act upon it.

In his Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus writes:

"Yet much worse still is the man who says it is good not to be born, but once born make haste to pass the gates of Death. For if he says this from conviction, why does he not pass away out of life? For it is open to him to do so, if he had firmly made up his mind to this. But if he speaks in jest, his words are idle among men who cannot receive them."

This passage highlights Epicurus's strong stance against such "idle" talk.

He viewed such expressions as foolish, particularly when the speaker did not act according to their professed conviction. If one genuinely believed it was better not to exist, Epicurus implied, the means to end one's life were available; the failure to do so demonstrated a lack of true conviction in their pessimistic philosophy.

For Epicurus, all good and evil consist in sensation, and death, being the cessation of sensation, is therefore "nothing to us."

He believed that by understanding the true nature of life and pleasure, and by recognizing the limits of life, one could achieve ataraxia (freedom from mental disturbance) and live happily.

This understanding, he argued, would dissolve the "black view of life" he so often criticized.

Lucretius's Philosophy : Scientific insights.

Lucretius: A Mind Ablaze with Reason

Fate did not preserve most of Epicurus's original writings, but fortunately, his devoted follower Lucretius safeguarded much of his philosophy in a remarkable poem: On the Nature of Things.

Written with reverence for his teacher—whom he called "the greatest man ever"—Lucretius infused the work with vivid verse and scientific insight, ensuring that the light of the Garden would not be extinguished by time or hostility.

Titus Lucretius Carus, born in Rome in 99 B.C. and dying at the age of forty-four in 55 B.C., is remembered as one of the world's great poets.

Yet his legacy has long been shadowed by rumors of mental illness.

One story claims he was driven mad by a love potion, possibly administered by his wife, and that he took his own life.

However, this tale emerged centuries after his death and lacks credible support.

Scholars like Hugh Andrew Johnstone Munro (1819–1885), a distinguished British classical scholar, dismiss it, affirming the reliability of his birth and death dates.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding his final years, some passages in On the Nature of Things suggest a deep weariness with life. In Book III, Lucretius writes:

"If life itself disgusts,

Why seek to add to it, to lose again

And perish all in vain?

Why not prefer to make an end of life and labour too?"

Elsewhere, he observes:

"Oft again, from fear of death,

Disgust of light and life seizes on men,

And with a saddened heart they do themselves to death."

These lines reflect not madness, but a profound philosophical grappling with mortality, fear, and the human condition.

He was clearly disillusioned by the “squalid passions and disputes unloosed on every side” in the world around him.

Perhaps Lucretius struggled with depression, as many sensitive minds do.

But his intellectual brilliance is undeniable. His poem deeply impressed Cicero, who likely reviewed and helped refine it, an endorsement that speaks volumes about its clarity and power.

The story of Lucretius’s madness may well have been a rumor , possibly propagated by early Christians whose beliefs were in direct opposition to the ideas expressed in his work.

De Rerum Natura boldly rejects superstition, divine intervention, and fear of the afterlife, views that would have deeply unsettled religious authorities seeking to shape public thought.

As you will see in his poem, Lucretius’s mind was not broken, it was ablaze.

He saw the universe not as a realm of divine punishment, but as a vast, self-governing system ruled by natural laws.

His courage to write such truths in poetic form, at a time when dogma reigned, is not a sign of madness but of rare philosophical integrity. If anything, the rumors of his instability reflect the discomfort his ideas caused in those who feared the freedom he offered.

Epicurus’s Memoirs: Request for Lucretius

Lucretius was one of the most brilliant minds to walk through my Garden. He often debated with me about atoms, adding fresh conceptions that stirred even my seasoned thoughts. One evening, just before I retired to my home—which, like my philosophy, was nestled within the Garden, I asked him to stay a while.

Lucretius reminded me of my youth.

He had a restless spirit, always drawn to paths no one had yet trodden. A keen observer of nature, his mind was sharp, his insights often startling in their clarity.

As we sat beneath the olive trees, I looked into his calm blue eyes and spoke with affection:

“My dear Lucretius, your genius astonishes me.

You have taken the seeds I planted and made them bloom in ways I could never have imagined. Yet I confess, there is a shadow upon my mind. I fear that when I am gone, politics—spurred on by the malice of our opponents—will close my garden and burn away the world I have built."

He paused, thoughtful, then replied with quiet conviction:

"I do not believe that will come to pass. You are the great teacher, the savior of the world's reason. Your light is too bright to be extinguished."

I answered more gravely:

"But imagine, my friend, if I were still alive and they fought me with their lies. Imagine what they might do when I am no longer here to defend myself."

Lucretius nodded slowly.

"Yes… you have made them doubt their own philosophies. Instead of thanking you for freeing them from fear, they turn against you.

They harm the very one who sought only to give them peace."

I placed my hand gently on his shoulder and said:

"Lucretius, there is one more thing I must ask of you. Write a book—set down everything you have learned from me, every truth we have uncovered together. If my work is ever burned, or if it vanishes into the dust of time, perhaps yours will survive. You live far from the eyes of the powerful; your words may escape their reach."

He looked at me with solemn devotion.

"I will do it, master. I will gather your wisdom into verse so that it may travel beyond the Garden, beyond our lifetimes. Even if they silence your voice, they will not silence the truth."

I felt a quiet relief settle over me.

"That is my hope. For ideas are like seeds—if one garden is destroyed, another may bloom where the wind carries them."

Lucretius smiled.

"And I will be that wind."

He loved to travel, often disappearing into the hills and coasts, always observing, always thinking.

He had taken my advice to stay away from public affairs, and so he remained unknown to most except to our school, where he was loved and respected by every student and teacher.

That night, I entered my chamber with peace in my heart, and slept beneath the stars with the comfort of knowing my Garden might yet live on.

Selected Passages from On the Nature of Things by Lucretius

Based on the 1919 translation by Sir Robert Allison

Lucretius, following the teachings of Epicurus, presents education, not just formal learning, but the cultivation of reason and the pursuit of knowledge, as a transformative force in human progress.

He portrays the development of civilization as a gradual but continuous journey from primitive survival to enlightened society, driven by both necessity and intellectual curiosity.

Driving Force for Progress and the Arts

Lucretius emphasizes that the primary catalyst for human advancement is the desire for comfort and utility:

"The want men feel of this or that for comfort and convenience,

Experience which teaches them gradually to satisfy their wants,

And finally the reason which co-ordinates the various experiences."

This process leads to refinement and mastery:

"Things grow one on another, clearer and more bright in arts,

Until they've reached their topmost height."

In other words, practical needs spark innovation, and reason organizes accumulated knowledge into increasingly sophisticated skills and artistic expression.

Gradual Advance to Civilization

Early human life, according to Lucretius, was marked by raw survival.

Progress came through discovery and adaptation:

"Man in his early stages, though naked and unarmed, was strong and vigorous...

Then discoveries mark his gradual advance: he learns to clothe himself,

To make a hut to dwell in, and last, and most important, to light a fire for warmth."

This evolution led to more stable social structures:

"By degrees their habits become less wild: men and women live together in one family,

The weak are protected, law and custom come into force—civilisation has begun."

Invention of Language and Sciences

Lucretius credits the invention of language, metallurgy, and the rise of various arts and sciences as pivotal milestones:

"The use of fire for melting metals gave rise to industries,

And from this sprang the various arts and sciences."

He is recognized as:

"One of the first to trace the progress of the human race

Through intellectual and technological advancement."

Developing Independent Thought

Lucretius advocates for critical reasoning and self-reliance:

"To rely on another's mouth for knowledge—such as in the fight for fame or ambition

Is useless, and leads to a path full of danger."

Instead, he urges:

"Understand Nature's laws, and use your own senses."

Anticipation of Scientific Discovery

Lucretius is celebrated as:

"An ally of the man of science,

Whose scientific and imaginative spirit,

Close observation of nature, and vision of the mind

Allowed him to arrive at, and anticipate, many discoveries of modern scientists."

Lucretius on Happiness: A Philosophy of Tranquility and Reason

1. Freedom from Fear — Especially of Death and the Gods

A central obstacle to happiness, according to Lucretius, is the fear of death and divine punishment. He refers to this as the "dread of Acheron" and "superstitious terrors"—irrational beliefs that torment the mind. He asserts:

"Death is enough to us, no, not a jot, since the mind is mortal."

By understanding that the soul is not immortal and that death is simply the end of sensation, one can let go of fear and embrace life. True pleasure, he says, is:

"Pure and unalloyed."

The "darkness of the mind" caused by fear is not dispelled by sunlight or brightness, but only by:

"Nature's face and knowledge of her laws."

2. Contentment and Frugality over Worldly Ambition

Lucretius critiques the endless human pursuit of wealth, power, and fame, which he sees as sources of anxiety and dissatisfaction. He writes:

"Nature craves for nothing for itself,

More than that we should have the body free from pain,

And in the mind enjoy sweet peace,

From care and fear set free."

He warns that striving for status or riches leads to:

"Endless labour... wandering all abroad, and straying far

To reach the path of life."

External rewards, whether noble birth, learning, or royal power—do not nourish the soul:

"All the wealth has less affects than our mortal frame,

Nor noble birth, nor even the glory of a crown—

These profit not the mind."

Instead, he praises a simple life:

"A frugal life is great wealth."

3. The Role of Reason and Philosophy

Lucretius sees reason as the key to dispelling ignorance and achieving peace. He calls it the:

"Power of mighty reason."

Philosophy, especially the teachings of Epicurus, is portrayed as a guiding light. Epicurus is honored as:

"A God, a very God, who found the plan of life

Which now is termed philosophy, whose skill

Has freed our life from such a billowy sea

And such thick darkness, and has set it safe

In such tranquillity, such light dwells."

Through his teachings:

"With words of truth he cleansed their hearts,

And put an end to lust and fearsomeness,

And set on high what was the greatest good."

This understanding allows one to:

"Gaze on all things with a tranquil mind."

4. Avoidance of Vain Desires and Internal Turmoil

Unchecked desires, Lucretius warns, are a major source of unhappiness.

He observes that people:

"Not knowing what they want, and ever seeking change of scene,"

And endlessly crave

"what they crave,"

Even when it brings no lasting satisfaction.

He cautions against:

“Bitter cares of lust, fears, pride, filth, wantonness, sloth, and luxury,”

Which “rend man’s troubled heart.”

Instead, he advocates for:

“An honestest and sincere heart,”

Noting that guilt and inner conflict destroy peace:

“The conscience-stricken mind in deep alarm

Supplies fresh goads, and terrifies itself,”

"Lucretius: Epicurean and Poet," by John Masson, which delves into the life and profound philosophical contributions of Lucretius, highlighting his role as a devoted exponent of Epicureanism and his significant impact as a poet.

Lucretius's Life According to Masson

Masson portrays Lucretius's life as largely mysterious, with few concrete details, leading to ongoing scholarly debate.

St. Jerome's Chronicle records his birth around 94 B.C., his madness caused by a love-philtre, his composition of books during intervals of his ailment (which Cicero later corrected), and his suicide at age forty-four.

This dating is often reconciled with Suetonius's account (who states Lucretius died on the day Virgil assumed the toga virilis in 54 B.C.) by favoring an earlier birthdate around 99 or 98 B.C., as suggested by scholars like Munro.

The narrative emphasizes a potential "mental disturbance" in Lucretius, inferred from the love-philtre story and his reported madness.

Scholar Stampini suggests this points to an underlying organic illness, with the poem itself showing signs of mental strain or melancholia, supported by Lucretius's descriptions of dreadful visions in both waking and sleeping hours.

Despite his reclusive nature, Lucretius is believed to have belonged to a noble family, evident from the independent tone of his dedication to Memmius, a prominent statesman.

His circle of friends likely included influential figures such as Cicero, Atticus, M. Brutus, and C. Cassius, though widespread confirmation for the latter three is not explicitly found outside of Borgius's Life of Lucretius.

He dedicated his major work, De Rerum Natura, to Memmius, whom he admired and to whom he aimed to spread the "light" of Epicurean philosophy.

His conversion to Epicureanism likely occurred later in his life, and his commitment was so thorough that Epicurus's philosophy entirely dominated his spirit.

This intense devotion led him to spend quiet nights composing his poem, a labor Masson describes as physically and mentally exhausting.

The unfinished state of his poem, abruptly broken off, further suggests a life cut short by unforeseen circumstances, possibly his nervous disease or suicide.

Lucretius's Ideas and Philosophy According to Masson

Lucretius's philosophical contributions, as interpreted by Masson, are intrinsically linked to Epicurus and are primarily articulated in his monumental poem, De Rerum Natura.

Atomic Theory:

Lucretius eloquently expounded the atomic theory of Democritus as developed by Epicurus.

Nature of Atoms: All things are composed of indestructible, solid "first-beginnings" or "seeds" (atoms), which are exceedingly small and of many different shapes.

World's Origin:

The world is created from the random collision and combination of these atoms in infinite space and time,

"without the hand of the Gods."

Declination (Clinamen):

A crucial element is the atomic declination or "swerve" (clinamen), a slight, unpredictable deviation in the atoms' downward path.

This swerve allows atoms to meet and combine, forming the world, and, more importantly, provides the "basis for free-will in humans,

> *" liberating the mind from absolute necessity. Lucretius argues that if free-will exists in man, it must also exist in the matter from which man is composed, applying the axiom "nothing can come from nothing."*

Soul's Nature:

The soul is corporeal and mortal, made of exceedingly fine, smooth, and round atoms. It is dispersed after death, leading to an "annihilation of sensation."

The mind (animus) and soul (anima) together form a single nature and are interlaced throughout the body.

Critique of Religion and Superstition:

Lucretius launched an uncompromising attack on the "superstitious fears" and "false religion" of his day, which he believed enslaved mankind and caused immense suffering, as exemplified by the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

Nature of Gods: He adopted the Epicurean view that gods exist but are perfectly tranquil, blissful beings dwelling in the "intermundia" (spaces between worlds), entirely unconcerned with human affairs or the governance of the world.

They are perceived through "subtle images" that float into the minds of the pious.

Purpose of Physics: The primary goal of studying physics and understanding natural laws is to dispel these irrational fears and demonstrate that all phenomena occur through natural causes, not divine caprice.

This principle of "law in Nature" is a key contribution.

Ethics and Happiness (Ataraxia):

Lucretius's ethical teachings, derived from Epicurus, aim at achieving happiness, defined as "freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind" (ataraxia or tranquillity).

Political Quietism: He advocated withdrawal from public and political affairs, as they introduce anxiety and dependence on others, hindering the attainment of peace of mind.

Importance of Friendship: Friendship is a cornerstone of Epicurean life, offering security and support.

Control of Desires and Temperament: He emphasized the "eradication of excessive desires, ambition, avarice, and luxury," which are sources of misery and mental turmoil.

He believed that through reason and training, individuals could largely overcome inherited negative temperaments and live a life

"worthy of the Gods."

Poetic and Scientific Contributions

Lucretius is unique in using epic poetry to convey scientific and philosophical doctrines.

Scientific Method: He possessed a "distinct grasp of scientific method" and a "strong scientific imagination," using vivid illustrations to explain complex atomic theories.

"Flaming Walls of the World":

His iconic phrase, flammantia moenia mundi, encapsulates the grandeur and mystery of the universe while being rooted in Epicurean cosmology.

Influence:

His poem profoundly influenced subsequent Roman poets like Virgil and Horace, shaping their understanding of nature and the human condition, even if they later diverged from strict Epicureanism.

Masson also points out subtle contradictions, noting that despite his materialistic creed, Lucretius's deep compassion for humanity and his appreciation for the world's beauty often elevate his work beyond mere Epicurean dogma, suggesting a "truer Lucretius" emerging from his intense poetic spirit.

Lucretius's Insights on Modern science

Masson's work, drawing on the philosophies of Epicurus and Lucretius, presents a compelling case for the ancient origins of concepts akin to modern natural selection and evolution.

He suggests that Ancient Greece can claim to have originated and developed the doctrine which Darwin later revived as Natural Selection.

Tracing the roots of this doctrine, Masson begins with Empedocles, from whom Epicurus adopted certain ideas on the origin of life and species. Empedocles believed that organisms arose through

"fortuitous combinations of the elements" and that there was a "final preservation of the fittest, while the others perish as they are produced."

His vision, however, was cruder than later developments, imagining, for example, individual organs wandering independently before combining, an idea Epicurus rejected.

Lucretius, in De Rerum Natura, offers what Masson sees as remarkable anticipations of Darwinian principles.

He describes the *early earth producing a variety of "monstrous creatures," many of which were "unable to preserve themselves from danger, or to secure food," and thus perished.*

Only a few well-adapted forms survived. Animals that lacked natural advantages or usefulness to humans eventually "died out in the fight for existence." Masson observes that Lucretius "sees as clearly as any Darwinist the pitilessness of Nature" and demonstrates "a firm grasp of this central doctrine of Darwinism."

In explaining the origin of the world, Lucretius describes atoms

"driven together and tormented by constant shocks from all eternity," attempting "motions and unions of every kind" until they

> *"fall at length into the arrangements out of which this world of ours has been formed."*

This recalls Democritus's metaphor of "atomic sifting," in which atoms "run like to like" and are "sifted out" to form worlds and living things.

Lucretius firmly rejects the notion of a "Divine Mechanist fashioning the World from without," instead presenting Nature as a "self-working Power."

This view aligns with modern materialist perspectives that detach the Creator from the universe and locate the formative power within matter itself.

Despite these parallels, Masson stresses important differences between Lucretius's and Darwin's theories. Lucretius repeatedly and emphatically asserted the permanence and distinctness of all natural types.

His concept of species did not include the capacity to vary in response to environmental pressures; he believed that

> *"a living creature must cease to exist on the slightest change of its form or type."*

On this point, Masson notes, Lucretius "would at once have joined battle with Lamarck and Darwin."

Unlike Darwinian evolution, which involves the gradual transformation of species into one another, Lucretius's theory did not embrace such modification.

Instead, he emphasized the earth's "marvellous procreative power" to produce a diversity of organisms, with only the suitably framed ones surviving.

Masson also connects Lucretius's ideas to later scientific materialism.

In his famous Belfast Address, Professor Tyndall described how modern materialism explains the origin of life through "evolution," seeing in matter "the promise and potency of every form and quality of life." Tyndall's account of natural selection depicts nature

"daily and hourly scrutinizing throughout the world every variation... rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up that which is good."

Yet Tyndall differed from Darwin in suggesting that matter itself possessed the inherent potency for life from the outset, rather than requiring a single "primordial living form" as Darwin proposed.

Similarly, Clifford suggested that the first molecule of protoplasm was "produced by a coincidence and preserved by natural selection."

Although Lucretius did not articulate natural selection in the fully developed form later presented by Darwin, his atomic theory,

His insistence on nature's self-sufficiency, and his observations on the survival and extinction of living forms provided significant conceptual groundwork that foreshadowed later evolutionary thought.

Friendship: The Cornerstone of Epicurean Happiness

Epicurean philosophy places friendship at the very heart of human happiness and well-being, describing it as "the cornerstone of Epicurean happiness."

Epicurus's letters revered by his followers "as if epistles of an apostle"along with his Principal Doctrines and surviving fragments, reveal a profound and multifaceted appreciation for friendship within the Epicurean community.

These are no more examples about the importance of Friendship than the Garden itself.

1. Importance for a Blessed and Secure Life

Epicurus explicitly states:

"Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship."

He refers to friendship as an "immortal good" for the noble soul and emphasizes its role in providing asphaleia—security against the "limited evils of this life." It is proclaimed that:

"Friendship shall put the crown on your security and your joy."

The concept of oikeiotes, meaning "membership in the family," underscores the deep familial bond cultivated within the Epicurean community.

2. Origin in Need, Elevated by Practice

While Epicurus acknowledges that:

"All friendship is desirable in itself,"

"It starts from the need of help."

He courageously bases friendship on mutual advantage, recognizing the mixed nature of human motives. Yet he insists that:

"It is impossible to maintain friendship long unless we love our friends as well as we love ourselves,"

"In friendship it is better to do good than to receive it."

The ideal is to rise "to a higher plane" within the "magic sphere of Friendship," where relationships become "utterly disinterested" despite their self-interested origins. True friendship, he teaches:

"Crystallizes only in the course of close association among those who have come to enjoy the fullness of pleasure."

3. Commitment, Loyalty, and Sacrifice

Epicurean friendship demands deep commitment. Followers are advised:

"For friendship's sake we must even run risks."

Loyalty is paramount—if a friend proves unfaithful, one's "whole life will be confounded." Epicurus affirms:

"The wise man will never desert a friend."

In extreme cases:

"An occasion may come when the wise man will die for his friend."

This is seen as a "supreme assertion of freedom," transcending personal safety. Importantly, the psychological benefit of friendship is emphasized:

"It is not so much our friends' help that helps us as the confidence of their help."

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4. Community Life and Shared Experiences

Epicurus fostered a strong sense of community, describing his Garden as a "family of brothers" and referring to his disciples as his "children." He famously asserted:

"Life without a friend is just the gulping of a lion or a wolf."

He rejected the Pythagorean idea of a "community of goods," believing:

"Distrust could not go with friendship."

To strengthen bonds and perpetuate his teachings, Epicurus instituted monthly gatherings on the twentieth day, featuring “bountiful repasts” that served as “memorial sacraments” for founders and deceased members. During times of scarcity, such as the siege of Athens, he shared provisions like beans—demonstrating practical mutual aid.

He also believed in sharing wealth to:

“Win the good-feeling of friends, which is the true wealth.”

5. Personal Affection and Benevolence

Epicurus’s letters reveal a “strong yet tender character” and “unsurpassed kindness to all.” He exchanged affectionate and playful remarks with his disciples. To Leontion, he wrote:

“Lord and Saviour, my dearest Leontion, what a hurrahing you drew from us when we read aloud your dear letter.”

To Pythocles:

“I will sit down and wait for your lovely and godlike appearance.”

A charming letter to Metrodorus’s child shows his care for the community’s families. Even on his deathbed, in a letter to Idomeneus, he found joy in:

“The recollection of my conversations with you.”

He also wrote “The Friends in Lampsacus,” showing his continued engagement with his wider circle. His “mildness, candor, and good humor” helped him:

“Secure… a thousand friends.”

He extended “brotherly love to embrace mankind,” seeing it as:

“The impelling motive for revealing to men the way to happiness.”

6. Grief and Remembrance of Lost Friends

Epicurus acknowledged:

“Sweet is the memory of a dead friend.”

He advised expressing grief not through lamentation, but through meditation on their lives.

Within the Epicurean brotherhood, he promoted an “immortality of remembrance,” establishing practices like:

“Pious memoirs of the deceased associates,”

as a substitute for belief in the immortality of the soul.

7. Ethical and Philosophical Context of Friendship

Friendship is essential for satisfying the “craving for human love” and preventing dissatisfaction. Epicurus believed that philosophy should foster human connection. He criticized Polyaenus’s devotion to science if it did not:

“Enlarge the sphere of our affections.”

In summary, Epicurus saw friendship not merely as a social bond, but as a philosophical necessity, an enduring source of joy, security, and moral growth. Within the Epicurean tradition, friendship is not a luxury; it is the very foundation of a happy life.

Epicurus's Memoirs: The Sophist and Friendship

In the twilight of Athens, when the marble streets glowed with the last light of day, I found myself in debate with a lone figure who stood apart from the laughter and warmth of the Garden.

His name was Callistratus, a sophist of sharp tongue and sharper memory.

He had once trusted deeply, only to be betrayed by those he called friends.

Now, he taught that friendship was a trap, a sentimental illusion that dulled the mind and exposed the heart.

He wandered past the gates of our Garden, where quiet conversation drifted like incense.

I was seated beneath an olive tree when I noticed the stranger's scowl.

"Callistratus," I greeted warmly, "you wear solitude like armor. But even armor rusts."

He replied coldly, "I've seen what friendship brings—envy, betrayal, dependence. Better to walk alone than be stabbed by those who walk beside you."

I smiled gently. "You speak from pain, not reason. Yet even pain can teach."

I gestured to a scroll beside me and read aloud:

"Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship."

Callistratus scoffed. "Words. I've had friends who vanished when fortune turned. Who smiled while plotting. Who praised me in public and poisoned me in private."

I nodded. "Then you have known false friends. But would you condemn the sun because once you were burned?"

I continued:

"It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as the confidence of their help."

He paused. The words stirred something buried. I saw it in his eyes, he remembered a boyhood companion who once stood by him in a street brawl, bleeding but laughing.

That memory had long been locked away.

I leaned forward. “Friendship begins in need, yes. But it rises to a higher plane. In the magic sphere of friendship, we learn to love not for gain, but for goodness.”

Callistratus looked away. “Perhaps you are right. Perhaps your Garden is different.

But I cannot forget what I’ve seen. I respect your wisdom, Epicurus. I see the peace it brings. But I will not open my gates again.”

I did not argue. I simply said:

“Sweet is the memory of a dead friend. And sweeter still is the courage to try again.”

Callistratus bowed slightly. “You are a rare man. I will not call you friend. But I will call you honest.”

And with that, the sophist walked on—unchanged in belief, but softened in spirit. The Garden remained behind him, blooming with laughter, and though he never entered, he carried its echo with him.

I have my critics among the sophists, but I do not dismiss them.

They are critical thinkers, trained to use their senses and experiences to understand reality. Is earning a living from philosophy a crime?

Most philosophers, myself included, have taught students from wealthy families, artists, nobles, and merchants. Did they expect us to work for free?

I believe the discomfort with sophists comes from their ability to make people question their reality.

They embrace the relativity of morality, and that unsettles those who seek certainty.

Epicurus’s Memoirs: My Critique of the Sophists

After my encounter with Callistratus, I found myself reflecting more deeply on the Sophists.

They are clever men, no doubt. Skilled in rhetoric, masters of persuasion.

But I have long held that their brilliance often serves performance more than truth.

Their approach to philosophy tends to favor argument for its own sake.

The eristics among them, in particular, argue not to illuminate, but to win.

They delight in victory, not instruction. The Megarians, for example, twist logic into knots for sport. One of their thinkers even claimed that the wise man has no need of friends—a view I find deeply at odds with nature and human flourishing.

Epicurus's Revolt

Against the Intellectual Giants of Greece

Epicurus was no stranger to controversy. Many philosophers insulted him for his direct and uncompromising opinions, and he, along with his followers, often responded with sharp criticism and satire.

As the Egyptian proverb says, "There is no smoke without fire." Epicurus and his school leveled pointed critiques against several of Greece's most revered thinkers, including Socrates and Aristotle.

Criticism of Socrates

Epicurus and his followers condemned key aspects of Socrates' philosophical method and public persona:

- Socratic Irony: Epicurus rejected Socratic irony, viewing it as a form of dishonesty—a deliberate concealment of a "devastating skill in debate" that often led to the humiliation of interlocutors.

This ethical objection marked a major divergence from Socratic practice, as Epicureans valued parresia—absolute frankness and transparency.

- Satire and Ridicule: Colotes, an Epicurean disciple, ridiculed Socrates in his satirical writings on Greek philosophers.

The Epicurean school was known for using biting language and satire against prominent figures such as Socrates, Pythagoras, Protagoras, and others, challenging their reputations and philosophical methods.

Criticism of Aristotle

Epicurus and his school also expressed strong philosophical opposition to Aristotle:

- Refutative Writings: Hermarchus, Epicurus's successor, authored Against Aristotle, signaling a direct challenge to Aristotelian thought. Metrodorus, another leading Epicurean, wrote Against the Logicians and Against the Sophists, which likely included critiques of Aristotle's contributions to logic and dialectic.

- Ethical Teachings: Epicurus's concept of pleasure sharply diverged from Aristotle's view of happiness.

While Aristotle defined the Chief Good as "living well" through the full exercise of virtue, Epicurus argued that pleasure is the "root of all good" and "the beginning and the end of a happy life."

He rejected Aristotle's idea of a hierarchy of pleasures culminating in intellectual contemplation, insisting instead that all pleasures belong to a single class.

- Logic and Dialectic: Epicurus dismissed both Aristotelian logic and Platonic dialectic, believing they relied too heavily on abstract argumentation and led away from practical understanding.

He championed simplicity and clarity in philosophical expression, in contrast to Aristotle's complex analytical style.

- Physical Theories: Epicurus took a unique position in natural philosophy, selecting and modifying ideas from earlier thinkers to suit his own framework.

He prioritized physics over ethics and objected to certain physical theories, particularly those that neglected ethical concerns or promoted determinism.

Hermarchus wrote On Empedocles, and Epicurus himself authored critiques of physicists, favoring thinkers like Anaxagoras and Archelaus.

- Scientific Disputes: Epicurus adopted Democritus's atomic theory and cosmogony, which Aristotle had famously dismissed. This scientific divergence further deepened the philosophical rift between the two schools.

Broader Opposition

Epicurus and his followers also expressed strong criticism toward Plato and the Platonists, as well as the Stoics. Their opposition was not merely personal—it was rooted in fundamental philosophical disagreements about ethics, metaphysics, and the role of reason in human life.

Epicurus's revolt against the intellectual elite of Greece was not driven by disdain for learning, but by a commitment to clarity, honesty, and the pursuit of peace.

His philosophy challenged the dominant traditions of his time, offering a radically different vision of happiness grounded in pleasure, friendship, and freedom from fear.

Epicurus's Revolt Against Plato and Platonism

Platonism was, in many ways, the philosophical punching bag for Epicurus. His opposition to Plato was not incidental—it was foundational.

The structure of Epicureanism was shaped in direct response to Platonic thought, and Epicurus positioned himself as a penetrating critic of Platonism.

Rejection of Platonic Dialectic

Epicurus explicitly rejected Platonic dialectic, calling it a "superfluity" and criticizing its reliance on abstract verbal argument. He viewed it as:

> *"Walking around uselessly and harping upon the question, 'What is the meaning of good?'"*

His rejection was both ethical and intellectual. He denied the four core assumptions of dialectic:

- That reason alone is the criterion of truth

- That sensations are unreliable

- That phenomena are unstable

- That eternal ideas are the only real existences.

Critique of the Theory of Ideas

As a materialist, Epicurus accepted only atoms and the void as real. He rejected Plato's eternal Forms as unreal abstractions.

He ridiculed the notion that:

"Horseness" is a real existence, while actual horses are mere shadows.

He also mocked Plato's explanation of aging—attributing it to the "detrition of angular atoms"as absurd, since Epicurean atoms were considered indestructible.

Opposition to Platonic Education (Paideia)

Epicurus opposed the entire Platonic curriculum, especially geometry, rhetoric, and dialectic. He advised:

> *"To sea with your swift ship, blessed boy, and flee from all education (paideia)."*

He praised students who had "kept themselves pure" by avoiding these studies, particularly geometry and arithmetic, which he saw as promoting belief in the divinity of heavenly bodies—an idea he considered harmful to peace of mind.

Gods and Cosmology

Epicurus criticized Plato's association of divinity with sphericity, asking why gods couldn't take other beautiful geometric forms like cubes or pyramids.

He found the idea of a "spherical god hurtling through space" to be a strange and misguided conception of happiness.

He condemned Plato for focusing exclusively on celestial phenomena and treating heavenly bodies as divine, calling this view “inimical to peace of mind.” He labeled Plato a “mythologer” for accepting astral myths while ignoring terrestrial realities, and considered belief in astral gods both “absurd” and “blasphemous.”

Ethics and Virtue

Epicurus challenged Plato’s idea of an ascending series of pleasures culminating in intellectual contemplation. Instead, he emphasized the essential unity of pleasure, arguing that all pleasures belong to the same class.

He criticized Plato for recognizing only “peaks of pleasure,” which made sustained happiness impossible.

He rejected the “harassing hopes of reward” tied to belief in immortality and the afterlife, and viewed Plato’s notion of true knowledge—apprehension of eternal ideas—as a form of skepticism, due to its dismissal of sensory experience.

He called Platonic justice a “specious pretense” and rejected the idea of “absolute justice.” He also derided Plato’s undemocratic social theory that divided citizens into men of gold, silver, and iron.

Specific Figures and Satirical Epithets

Epicurus referred to Plato as “the Golden,” likely mocking his elitist social divisions or his taste for splendor.

He called Plato’s followers “high-steppers” and “hangers-on of Dionysus.”

Hermarchus, Epicurus’s successor, wrote Against Plato, while Colotes, another Epicurean, satirized ancient philosophers including Plato, with surviving fragments targeting works like Lysis and Euthydemus.

General Opposition

Epicurus considered Platonism and skepticism among his chief abominations. He positioned himself as an Antiplatonist, and more than half of his Forty Authorized Doctrines directly contradict Platonic principles.

He classified Plato's philosophy as metaphysical, separating phenomena and form from matter and substance—an approach Epicurus saw as misleading and incompatible with a life of peace.

Epicurus's Criticisms of the Stoics

Epicurus's relationship with Stoicism was marked by philosophical antagonism, though this tension developed after his lifetime.

The two schools were not contemporaries in origin or early influence.

Chronological Discrepancy

The traditional grouping of Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics reverses the actual historical order. Epicurus's philosophy was a fully developed system before Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, began teaching.

The feud between the schools was largely initiated by Chrysippus, the second founder of Stoicism, after Epicurus's death. Thus, Stoicism had no direct influence on Epicurus's life or thought.

Ethics and Morality

Epicurus reacted strongly against what he saw as exaggerated and dangerous Stoic doctrines, including:

- The belief that virtue and pleasure are essential opposites

- The doctrine that all sins are equal, denying any difference in degree between faults and vices

He rejected the Stoic ideal of a rigid, unemotional morality based on an inflexible cosmic order. Instead, Epicurus recognized emotions as natural and integral to human life. While Stoics praised self-sufficiency, Epicurus offered a more nuanced view, linking it to freedom from unnecessary desires, not emotional detachment.

Logic

Epicurus dismissed Stoic logic, criticizing it for relying on abstract verbal arguments that distracted from practical understanding. He referred to logicians—including Stoics—as:

“The destroyers.”

He opposed their insistence on deductive reasoning alone, favoring a more empirical and sensory-based approach to knowledge.

Physics and Theology

Epicurus’s teachings implicitly challenged Stoic physics and theology.

While Stoic physics were sometimes seen as weak, their conception of God as a universal Providence was considered more grand than Epicurus’s non-interventionist divine beings.

Epicurus’s broader “war against religion” encompassed many prevailing theological views, including those later adopted by Stoicism. Notably, the Stoic term pronoia (providence) is absent from Epicurus’s writings, suggesting that this doctrine had not yet emerged during his time.

Direct Attacks and Misrepresentations

Stoic philosophers were persistent critics of Epicurus:

- Diotimus the Stoic falsely attributed fifty lewd letters to Epicurus in an attempt to discredit him

- Posidonius and Epictetus also attacked Epicurus, with Epictetus calling him a “filthy talker” and abusing him roundly

- Stoic critics often misrepresented Epicurean doctrines, especially his views on pleasure.

They reduced his concept of pleasure as freedom from pain to absurd caricatures—such as comparing it to a guest enjoying a cocktail.

Ironically, the Stoics also borrowed freely from Epicureanism, notably adopting the concept of prolepsis (anticipation), a key element in Epicurean epistemology.

Epicurus’s criticisms of Stoicism were rooted in deep philosophical differences, especially regarding ethics, logic, and theology.

While the Stoics emphasized virtue, duty, and divine order, Epicurus championed pleasure, clarity, and peace of mind. The rivalry between the schools shaped centuries of debate, and their opposing visions of the good life remain influential to this day.

Epicurus's Core Mission: Defend Happiness Through Certainty

Epicurus believed that human happiness depends on knowledge, and skepticism—especially Pyrrhonism—undermined that by denying the reliability of reason and sensation.

To Epicurus, this wasn't just an intellectual disagreement; it was a threat to mental peace and ethical living

His Canon: A Weapon Against Doubt

To counter skepticism, Epicurus built his Canon of Truth, which grounded knowledge in:

- Sensations: Direct experiences of the world

- Anticipations (prolepsis): Innate mental impressions or preconceptions

- Feelings: Pleasure and pain as guides to value

This was a radical move: instead of abstract dialectics, Epicurus trusted empirical reality and subjective experience as the foundation for truth.

His Philosophical Counterattacks

Epicurus didn't just build his own system—he actively refuted skeptical arguments:

- He exposed the flaw in rejecting all sensations: if you deny them, you lose the very tools needed to judge deception.

- He argued that errors come from judgment, not sensation itself.

- He showed that contradictions in perception (like the bent oar) are resolved by deeper sensory analysis, not by abandoning trust in the senses.

His Critique of Other Philosophers

Epicurus saw skeptical tendencies even in thinkers like:

- Plato, who dismissed sensory data in favor of eternal forms

- Democritus, whose relativism ("by convention") threatened objective truth

Even though Epicurus borrowed from Democritus's atomism, he rejected the idea that reality was unknowable or merely conventional.

Refutative Writings and Direct Engagement

Epicurus and his followers didn't shy away from confrontation.

They wrote polemics against skeptics, dialecticians, and sophists—anyone who sowed doubt or confusion.

His work Against Eurylochus was a direct attack on Pyrrhonian skepticism, and Metrodorus joined the fray with his own critiques.

Serenity vs. Skepticism

Ultimately, Epicurus believed that skepticism breeds turmoil, while certainty breeds peace. His goal wasn't just intellectual clarity, it was ataraxia, the serene state of mind that comes from understanding the world and trusting your experience of it.

Epicurus's Memoirs :Justification

I know I was harsh in my criticism of the great philosophies. But I spoke plainly, without the veil of polite hypocrisy. I said what I believed, not what others wanted to hear.

My goal was simple: to break the chains of fear and intellectual slavery. I held that any philosophy which does not serve human happiness has no right to exist.

Plato spoke of forms, perfect, eternal, untouchable.

Zeno preached virtue through suffering, as if pain were a badge of honor.

Aristotle dissected the soul like a butcher with a scalpel, never asking if the soul was happy.

The Skeptics doubted even their own senses, paralyzed by uncertainty.

I did not attack them out of malice. I attacked because I believed their ideas were useless—detached from life, indifferent to suffering. They did not seek to make people happy or free.

I embraced the atomic theory, but I criticized its founder for claiming reality could never be truly known. I was a free thinker. Had my philosophy been followed, there would be more science, less superstition.

I did not build a temple. I built a garden.

No marble columns. No golden idols. Just shade, wine, and conversation.

To my followers, now and in generations to come, I say this:

Do not fear anything. Make your life a garden, full of tranquility.

Let knowledge be your weapon against ignorance.

Let happiness be your compass.

Let reason be your guide, not superstition.

Aponia and Ataraxia

Introduction: A New Vision of Pleasure

Epicurus did not preach indulgence. He redefined pleasure not as fleeting sensual gratification, but as a state of equilibrium—a life free from bodily pain and mental disturbance.

Static vs. Kinetic Pleasure

Epicurus distinguished between:

Kinetic pleasures: Active pleasures like eating, drinking, or sexual gratification.

Katastematic (static) pleasures: The enduring state of well-being when pain and distress are absent.

For Epicurus, static pleasures are superior. Once pain is removed, pleasure is complete. There is no need to chase more.

"The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures."

Epicurus

Aponia: Bodily Peace

Aponia. A warm bed that eases fatigue brings Aponia.

It is the absence of suffering, not the presence of extravagance.

Example:

A man eats bread and olives after a long day. He feels no hunger, no discomfort. Though the meal is modest, he experiences perfect pleasure—because pain is gone.

Ataraxia: Mental Serenity

Ataraxia is the calm of the soul, free from fear, anxiety, and irrational beliefs. Epicurus taught that most mental suffering comes from false opinions—especially about gods, death, and desires.

Example:

A woman fears death. Epicurus teaches her: "When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not." She realizes death is nothing to fear. Her mind becomes tranquil—she has achieved Ataraxia.

Contrast with Other Philosophies

The Cyrenaics believed only in kinetic pleasure, motion, stimulation, excitement.

They saw the absence of pain as neutral, not pleasurable.

Epicurus disagreed. He argued that freedom from pain is the highest pleasure, and that chasing stimulation often leads to more pain.

Ethical Foundations

This redefinition of pleasure grounds Epicurean ethics:

- Pleasure is the beginning and end of a blessed life.
- Virtues like prudence and justice are valuable because they lead to Aponia and Ataraxia.
- Desires must be classified and managed to avoid unnecessary pain.

Classification of Desires

Epicurus divided desires into three types:

1. Natural and Necessary: Food, shelter, friendship. Easy to satisfy. Essential for Aponia.
2. Natural but Not Necessary: Luxuries. Can enhance pleasure but are not required.
3. Neither Natural nor Necessary (Vain): Fame, wealth, power. Difficult to obtain and often cause mental disturbance.

Example:

A man desires fame. He becomes anxious, competitive, and restless. Epicurus would say: abandon the vain desire. Seek peace, not applause.

Autarkeia: The Power of Simple Living

Epicurus praised self-sufficiency. A simple life makes one resilient. If you're content with little, fortune cannot disturb you.

"Plain savors bring pleasure equal to a luxurious diet once want is removed."

Hedonistic Calculus

Epicurus encouraged rational evaluation of desires:

"What will happen to me if I fulfill this desire—and what if I don't?"

This cost-benefit analysis helps avoid pain and choose wisely.

Fullness of Pleasure

Epicurus taught that pleasure can be complete in a finite life. You don't need immortality. If pain is absent and the soul is calm, you have everything.

Infallibility of the Doctrine

Epicurus claimed his teachings were infallible, not arrogantly, but because they were grounded in nature and reason. They offer a clear path to peace, free from superstition and confusion.

The Quiet Triumph of Pleasure

Epicurus's redefinition of pleasure is revolutionary. It shifts the goal from indulgence to tranquility, from stimulation to stability.

Aponia and Ataraxia are not just philosophical terms—they are the keys to a life well lived.

To live pleasantly is to live wisely, simply, and fearlessly.

Living the Tranquil Life **An Everyday Epicurean Guide**

Happiness does not depend on circumstances, money, or location. True pleasure can be found in simple, everyday activities—like walking, exercising, writing, exploring new hobbies, or spending time with friends who trust you as deeply as you trust yourself. Enjoy nature. Sit quietly in a garden. Let the breeze and sunlight remind you that joy is often right in front of you.

You don’t need to search for happiness—it already lives in your mind. You have everything within you to be happy. Even the absence of pain is a gift worth gratitude.

Practice gratitude each morning. Take time to reflect on what brings you peace. Stay away from social media or anything that neither brings pleasure nor helps relieve pain. Choose what nourishes your soul, and let go of what disturbs it.

I. Introduction: The Everyday Pursuit of Happiness

Epicurean happiness is not about indulgence or luxury, it is about ataraxia, peace of mind, and aponia, the absence of bodily pain. These are the true pleasures Epicurus taught us to seek.

Philosophy, for Epicurus, was not a theoretical exercise but a medicine for the soul. Just as doctors treat physical ailments, philosophy should heal our fears, anxieties, and confusions.

Do not make the fear of Death prevents you from living

Example: A woman overwhelmed by anxiety about death reads Epicurus’s teaching: “When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not.” She begins to sleep more peacefully, realizing death cannot harm her.

II. Cultivating Inner Peace: Freedom from Fear and Anxiety

Reverence for your Gods, Free from Fear.

If you have religions, you may reframe your idea about God, religion should help, not harm or cause trauma or psychological problems.

Epicurus taught that the gods are perfect and blissful—they do not meddle in human affairs. Fear of divine punishment is a superstition that disturbs the soul.

Example: A man raised in fear of divine wrath begins to reflect on Epicurus’s view.

He stops interpreting misfortunes as punishment and starts living with calm reverence, not fear.

Embracing Mortality: The Nature of Death

Death is not to be feared. It is the cessation of sensation, and therefore cannot be painful or disturbing.

Example: A terminally ill patient finds comfort in Epicurus's words. She focuses on enjoying her remaining days, free from dread, and finds joy in simple pleasures like sunlight and conversation.

Managing Desires: The Key to Contentment

Epicurus classified desires into three types:

- Natural and necessary: food, shelter, friendship.
- Natural but not necessary: luxury, sexual indulgence.
- Neither natural nor necessary: fame, wealth, power.

Example: A young man constantly craves gourmet meals. After studying Epicurus, he switches to simple, nourishing food and finds his cravings diminish and his satisfaction increases.

III. Achieving Bodily Well-being: The Simple and Self-Sufficient Life

The Virtue of Self-Sufficiency (Autarkeia)

Epicurus praised contentment with little. Simplicity leads to freedom from dependence and fear.

Example: A woman downsizes her lifestyle, moving to a smaller home and cooking simple meals. She feels more secure and less anxious about money, and enjoys her life more deeply.

Understanding and Enduring Pain

Pain is either brief and intense or chronic and mild. Epicurus taught that mental pleasures can outweigh physical discomfort.

Example: A man undergoing physical therapy focuses on the progress he's making and the support of his friends.

Though the sessions are painful, his mind remains joyful.

Prioritizing Health

Do not risk small pleasure to lose big pleasure.

Health is not just the absence of illness, it is a continuous pleasure. Epicurus emphasized wise choices in diet and lifestyle.

Example: A woman chooses to walk daily and eat fresh vegetables. She feels energized and peaceful, recognizing that health is a foundation for happiness.

IV. Engaging with the World: Society and Personal Conduct

The Indispensability of Friendship

Epicurus called friendship the greatest source of security and joy. Friends protect us, support us, and share life's pleasures.

Example:

A man going through a divorce finds solace in his close friends.

Their presence helps him recover emotionally and reminds him that happiness is not solitary.

Justice as Mutual Advantage

Justice is a social contract—an agreement not to harm or be harmed. It is chosen for the sake of peace.

Example:

A shopkeeper decides to treat customers fairly, not out of fear of punishment, but because it brings trust, stability, and peace of mind.

“Live Unknown” (Lathe Biosas)

Epicurus advised avoiding public life and fame, which often bring anxiety and dependence on others’ opinions.

Example:

A talented artist declines a major exhibition, preferring to create quietly in her studio. She finds more joy in the process than in public recognition.

V. The Epicurean Approach to Knowledge and Wisdom

The Value of “True Philosophy”

Epicurus’s teachings dispel fear and superstition. Philosophy should be practical and liberating.

Example:

A student overwhelmed by existential questions reads Epicurus and begins to feel grounded. She stops chasing abstract theories and focuses on living well.

Sober Calculation (Phronesis) and Foresight

Practical reason helps us make wise choices and avoid future pain.

Example: A man tempted to take a stressful job reflects using Epicurean foresight. He chooses a lower-paying role with better work-life balance, preserving his peace.

Rejecting Vain Learning: Do not make action without purpose

Epicurus distrusted speculative philosophy that causes confusion. He valued knowledge that leads to tranquility.

Example: A philosopher obsessed with metaphysical debates realizes they bring him no peace. He shifts to studying ethics and nature, finding clarity and calm.

VI. Conclusion: The Art of Living Happily

Happiness is not a destination, it is a daily practice.

It requires conscious choices, self-control, and the application of Epicurean principles.

Gratitude for past joys and wisdom is a source of present happiness. Memory, for Epicurus, is a reservoir of pleasure.

Example: An elderly man reflects on his life with friends, simple meals, and quiet evenings. Though his body is aging, his mind is full of joy.

Epicureanism is not an escape from life—it is a guide for living it fully, wisely, and peacefully. In every moment, we can choose tranquility over turmoil, simplicity over excess, and friendship over fame.

Let this philosophy be your companion—not in theory, but in practice.

Modern Epicurean Affirmations

Inner Medicine for Tranquility

I. Introduction: Affirmations as a Path to Peace

Epicurus's philosophy, often used affirmation as "the good easy to get " or "we can endure pain easily "

powerful statements for cultivating tranquility through positive affirmations.

These affirmations are designed to dispel fear, reduce anxiety, and foster inner peace through a rational understanding of reality.

Modern psychology supports this ancient practice. Studies show that affirmations can:

- Reduce stress and cortisol levels
- Improve self-esteem and emotional resilience
- Enhance problem-solving under pressure
- Promote healthier behavior and decision-making

A Stanford University study found that self-affirmation interventions, such as writing about personal values, can reshape how individuals perceive themselves and how others respond to them.

This is the social placebo effect in action: your internal belief radiates outward, influencing your experience and relationships.

Example: If you walk into a room believing "I am calm, capable, and worthy," others are more likely to respond with respect and warmth. Your self-perception becomes a lens through which the world sees you.

Epicurus understood this intuitively.

His teachings encouraged daily reflection and affirmation, not as abstract theory, but as philosophical medicine for the soul.

II. The Fourfold Remedy as Affirmation Practice

Each of the four principles of the Tetrapharmacon can be transformed into a set of affirmations, grounded in Epicurean doctrine and designed for daily use.

Affirmations on the Gods: Don't fear the gods.

Epicurus taught that the gods are blissful and incorruptible, living in perfect peace. They do not interfere in human affairs, nor do they reward or punish.

- "The blissful and incorruptible being neither knows trouble itself nor occasions trouble to another."
- "It is idle to seek from the gods what a man is capable of providing for himself."
- "Prayer for the Epicurean becomes communion."

Affirmation: I revere the divine as a symbol of peace, not fear. I am free from anxiety about divine punishment.

Affirmations on Death: Don't fear death.

Epicurus considered the fear of death the greatest source of human anxiety. He taught that death is the end of sensation and therefore cannot harm us.

- "There is no everlasting pain in a future life."
- "The fullness of pleasure is found in this mortal life."

Affirmation: I do not fear death—it is nothing to me. I live fully in the present, where joy resides.

Affirmations on Pleasure: What is good is easy to obtain.

True pleasure, for Epicurus, is found in ataraxia (peace of mind) and aponia (freedom from bodily pain). These are attainable through simplicity and wisdom.

- “The cry of the flesh is not to hunger, not to thirst, not to shiver with cold.”
- “We judge self-sufficiency to be a great good.”
- “Of all the preparations for the blessed life, friendship is the most precious.”
- “The pleasure keeps pace with the process of learning.”
- “The philosopher, remembering past joys, remains continually young.”
- “It is to continuous pleasures that I summon you.”

Affirmation: I find joy in simple things. I am content with little and grateful for much. Pleasure is always within reach.

Affirmations on Pain: What is terrible is easy to endure.

Epicurus taught that pain is either brief and intense or chronic and mild—and that the mind can triumph over both.

- “All bodily suffering is negligible: acute pain is short, chronic pain is light.”
- “Even if under torture, the wise man is happy.”
- “Over against pain, I set the joy in my soul at the recollection of wisdom.”
- “Sober calculation expels false opinions—the chief cause of mental turbulence.”
- “The trained will can dominate and repress sensations of bodily pain.”

Affirmation: Pain is manageable. My mind is strong, and my joy is greater than discomfort.

III. General Epicurean Affirmations for a Tranquil Life

These affirmations draw from Epicurus's broader teachings and offer daily reminders of his practical wisdom:

- "Happiness is mainly a matter of attitude, of which we are the arbiters."
- "Vain is the word of that philosopher by which no malady of mankind is healed."
- "The wise man will not be a doubter but will dogmatize."
- "Human nature is not to be coerced but persuaded."
- "Good will is a catchword of his creed no less than Peace and Safety."

Affirmation: I choose peace. I choose clarity. I choose joy.

IV. How to Use Epicurean Affirmations

Incorporate these affirmations into your daily life with intention:

- Morning Ritual: Begin each day by repeating 3–5 affirmations aloud or in writing.
- Mindful Moments: Use affirmations during walks, meditation, or quiet reflection.
- Stress Response: When anxious, repeat calming truths like "This pain is manageable" or "I am safe and capable."
- Social Encounters: Before meetings or conversations, affirm your worth and presence.

Example:

A teacher begins her day with "I bring peace and clarity to others." She enters the classroom with calm confidence, and her students respond with warmth and respect.

V. Conclusion: Affirmations as Epicurean Therapy

Affirmations are not empty slogans. They are philosophical tools, just as Epicurus intended—designed to heal the soul, dispel fear, and guide us toward a life of tranquility.

Epicurus gave us the framework. Modern science confirms its power. All that remains is to practice—daily, deliberately, and with joy.

Let your words become your sanctuary. Let your thoughts become your peace.

Happiness and Genetics

Nature, Nurture, and the Epicurean Mind

I. Rethinking Happiness

Happiness has long been considered a product of life circumstances, personal choices, and philosophical outlook.

Epicurus taught that true happiness lies in ataraxia (peace of mind) and aponia (freedom from bodily pain) states achievable through reason, simplicity, and friendship. These ideals emphasize mental clarity and emotional stability over material wealth or fleeting pleasures.

Modern science adds another layer: genetics. Recent research, including the study Happiness and Genetics — Nature, Nurture, and the Epicurean Mind, suggests that our genes play a significant role in shaping our emotional baseline. This doesn't mean happiness is predetermined—but it does mean that biology influences how easily we experience joy, resilience, and contentment.

II. The Genetic Blueprint of Well-Being

Behavioral genetics research, including twin and DNA studies, reveals that approximately 30–40% of our happiness is heritable.

This is known as the happiness set point—a genetically influenced baseline around which our mood tends to fluctuate.

Key genetic factors include:

- 5-HTTLPR, a gene affecting serotonin transport, linked to mood stability and emotional sensitivity.

- Dopamine-related genes, which influence reward processing, motivation, and pleasure.

- Oxytocin, a hormone associated with trust, bonding, and emotional warmth.

- BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor), which supports neural plasticity and resilience; low levels are associated with depression.

- Cortisol, the stress hormone, which rises in response to chronic stress and contributes to anxiety and sadness.

Professor Meike Bartels's twin studies show that even identical twins raised apart often share similar levels of well-being, highlighting the genetic component. However, genes are not destiny. Environmental factors, personal habits, and philosophical beliefs interact with our biology to shape our lived experience.

Key Insight: You may inherit a predisposition for optimism or vulnerability, but your choices, relationships, and mindset can override or enhance **these traits**

III. Hormones and Neurochemicals: Activating Joy and Easing Sadness

Our emotional states are shaped by a dynamic interplay of hormones and neurotransmitters. Understanding how these systems work—and how to activate them—can help us cultivate happiness and manage sadness.

- Serotonin, often called the "feel-good" neurotransmitter, regulates mood and promotes calm. It can be boosted through regular exercise, exposure to sunlight, a balanced diet, and meditation.

- Dopamine drives motivation and reward. Activities like goal-setting, creative engagement, and novelty stimulate dopamine release, enhancing pleasure and focus.

- Oxytocin is released during social bonding, physical touch, and acts of trust. It fosters emotional warmth and connection, reinforcing the value of friendship.

- Endorphins are natural painkillers that reduce stress and elevate mood. They are activated by laughter, physical activity, and pleasurable experiences.

- Cortisol, while essential for survival, becomes harmful when chronically elevated. Mindfulness, sleep hygiene, and emotional regulation help reduce cortisol levels.

- BDNF supports brain health and emotional resilience. It increases through aerobic exercise, learning, and restorative sleep.

>Example: A person feeling low can naturally elevate serotonin and dopamine by taking a walk in nature, connecting with a friend, and practicing gratitude—all aligned with Epicurean values.

IV. Epicureanism Meets Biology

Epicurus's philosophy offers a lifestyle that naturally supports hormonal balance and emotional well-being. His teachings encourage moderation, reflection, and meaningful relationships—all of which activate the neurochemical systems that promote happiness.

- Ataraxia reduces cortisol and stabilizes serotonin, fostering calm and clarity.

- Aponia encourages physical and mental ease, supporting endorphin release.

- Friendship boosts oxytocin, reinforcing emotional security and joy.

- Simplicity and self-sufficiency help regulate dopamine, avoiding the crash of overstimulation.

- Gratitude and philosophical reflection activate BDNF and strengthen neural resilience.

Epicurus emphasized that happiness is not found in wealth, fame, or indulgence—but in clarity, connection, and calm. These principles help individuals transcend genetic limitations and cultivate lasting well-being.

V. Conclusion: The Freedom to Flourish

Modern science shows that happiness is partly written in our genes—but Epicurus reminds us that freedom lies in how we respond. His philosophy empowers us to live wisely, regardless of our biological starting point.

Happiness is not a fixed trait—it's a skill. And with the right mindset, even those born with a lower set point can rise above it.

Let your biology be your foundation, and your philosophy be your wings.

The Necessity of Education at any age.

Learning Knows No Age: Epicurus and the Lifelong Pursuit of Wisdom

Epicurus firmly believed that as long as one is alive, one should never stop learning. He challenged the notion that education is reserved only for the young, insisting instead that learning is a lifelong process—regardless of age, gender, or social status. This belief is a cornerstone of Epicurean philosophy and was deeply embedded in the practices of his school.

Epicurus on the Timelessness of Philosophy

Epicurus famously declared:

"Let no one delay the study of philosophy when young, nor grow weary of it when old. For no one can come too early or too late to secure the health of the soul."

He compared those who claim philosophy is only for a certain age to those who say happiness has a time limit.

For Epicurus, both wisdom and happiness are timeless pursuits. He encouraged the young to become “old in blessings” through grateful reflection, and the old to be “young in blessings” through renewed understanding. Philosophy, in his view, was not a seasonal endeavor, it was a lifelong companion.

Philosophy for All

Epicurus embraced a radically inclusive approach.

His teachings were open to anyone willing to listen, not just elite scholars. Women, slaves, children, and elders were all welcome in his Garden.

He likened philosophy to medicine for the soul, available to all who sought healing and clarity.

Education Across Ages: The Epicurean School

The Epicurean school in Athens was structured to accommodate learners of all ages:

Elementary Classes:

Young pupils, called (“in preparation”), were guided by assistant leaders and taught to accept corrections with grace.

Adult Learners: Adults were known as “fellow-students in philosophy” and participated in lectures and even mystical nocturnal sessions.

Progressive Learning:

Students first acquired “right opinions,” then learned the reasoning behind them. Advancement was based on wisdom, not age.

Epicurus believed education should be persuasive, not coercive.

He rejected the rigid Platonic curriculum, which emphasized abstract disciplines like geometry and rhetoric, arguing instead for practical learning that nurtured the soul.

A Memoir: The Transformation of Theon

I have always been a proponent of education.

My school welcomed all, women, slaves, the young, the old, even children. Learning keeps the mind healthy and the soul vibrant.

Let me tell you the story of Theon, a man transformed.

Before meeting me in the house , Theon was full of prejudice.

A devoted Stoic, he followed Zeno and Cleanthes and was influenced by Platonic thought. He saw me as a shameless man, an advocate of vice, and believed I taught my followers to mock virtue.

One day, Theon wondered: If Epicurus is truly wicked, why have the gods not struck him down?

Why do the Athenians tolerate him? His curiosity sparked doubt in the teachings of my rivals.

We met by chance along the banks of the Cephisus. I was walking, enjoying nature, when I saw a man unfamiliar to me. I approached him with respect and said:

“Greetings, son. From which city do you come?”

He replied gently:

“I am from Corinth. I’ve come to Athens to study philosophy.”

I admired his thirst for knowledge. We walked until sunset, engaged in deep conversation. I then invited him to supper and revealed my identity:

“I am Epicurus.”

His eyes widened. “I am in the house of Epicurus—the shameless man?” he exclaimed, ready to flee.

But I smiled gently, and something in that moment made him stay.

We talked. The evening unfolded with conversations that slowly dismantled his prejudices. I challenged his assumptions:

“Why do you think I am bad?”

He answered, “Because the Philippics of Timocrates told me so.”

I advised him:

“Reject the Pythagorean maxim, ‘The master said so.’

Think for yourself.”

Theon looked into my eyes and asked, “What is virtue?”

I replied:

“Virtue is pleasure; were it not so, I would not follow it.”

I urged him:

“Learn henceforth to form your judgments upon knowledge, not hearsay. Credulity is always ridiculous—and often dangerous, failing.”

He realized that I did not teach indulgence in luxury, nor did I mock virtue. Though he remained a follower of Zeno, he came to defend me against his former teachers. His transformation was proof: learning knows no age. This memoir shows us that we can overcome the chains of a conditioned mind at any age. Theon did. So can we.

Science Confirms: Learning Prolongs Life and Sharpens the Mind

Epicurus taught that learning is essential at every stage of life. Today, science echoes his wisdom.

A notable study from the Framingham Heart Study, analyzed by Columbia University researchers and published in JAMA Network Open, found that higher educational attainment—even later in life—is linked to slower biological aging and increased longevity. Specifically:

Two additional years of schooling were associated with a 2–3% slower pace of aging

A 10% reduced risk of mortality

These effects were measured using epigenetic clocks, offering a biological lens into how education preserves health

Another compelling study, using a nationally representative sample of older U.S. adults, revealed that participation in educational or training courses in later life significantly improves cognitive function. The cognitive benefits were so substantial, they were equivalent to a 6-year age difference in mental sharpness.

These findings provide empirical support for the idea that learning is not just mentally enriching—it’s biologically protective. Education, even in later years, can delay cognitive decline, extend lifespan, and enhance quality of life.

The Legacy of Epicurus

From Atoms to Ethics

Epicurus's ideas were radical in their original context—and remain quietly revolutionary today. Though much of his original writing was lost over time, especially during the early Christian era when Epicurean texts were suppressed, his legacy endured through the voices of others, most notably the Roman poet-philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus.

Lucretius's epic poem De Rerum Natura ("On the Nature of Things") preserved and expanded Epicurean thought, passing it through antiquity, the Renaissance, and into modernity.

Epicurus's philosophy was not merely a guide to pleasure or a manual for living—it was a complete cosmology, epistemology, and ethical system that challenged prevailing religious and metaphysical doctrines. His materialism, empiricism, and ethical clarity laid foundational groundwork for early scientific inquiry and modern moral philosophy. His teachings continue to influence secularism, humanistic values, and the pursuit of mental well-being.

His school—the Garden in Athens—was revolutionary in its inclusivity, welcoming women, slaves, and foreigners. It was one of the first philosophical communities to embody egalitarian ideals, offering a model of intellectual democracy centuries ahead of its time.

Lucretius: The Poet of Atoms

Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 94–55 BCE), the most celebrated Roman Epicurean, immortalized Epicurean philosophy through poetic mastery in De Rerum Natura. This six-book epic was a sweeping defense of Epicurean physics, metaphysics, and ethics, aimed at liberating the mind from superstition and fear.

- Lucretius vividly described a universe composed of indivisible atoms moving in the void, firmly rejecting divine intervention and teleology.

- He proposed proto-Darwinian ideas, describing how nature selects what survives—an evolutionary perspective predating Darwin by nearly two millennia.

- His critique of superstition and religion as sources of irrational fear echoed and expanded Epicurus's quest for ataraxia—serene freedom from anxiety.

Lucretius's work influenced Renaissance humanists like Giordano Bruno, Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, and early modern scientists who revered naturalistic explanations. Though his atomic theory was later eclipsed by Newtonian physics, his worldview anticipated the scientific method: observe, explain, and reject unfounded metaphysics.

Epicurus and the Birth of Scientific Thinking

Epicureanism was among the first comprehensive philosophies to explain the world purely through material causes, denying the interference of gods in natural processes. Key teachings include:

- All phenomena have natural causes rooted in the interaction of atoms.
- The soul is material, composed of fine atoms, and dissolves with the body at death—removing fear of an afterlife.
- Sensory experience is the foundation of human knowledge, highlighting Epicurus's proto-empiricism.

Epicurean principles influenced early disciplines such as meteorology, biology, and medicine.

The founder of the Alexandrian school of medicine, Herophilus, likely drew from naturalizing principles akin to Epicurean thought.

During the Enlightenment, Epicureanism was revived by thinkers like Pierre Gassendi, who reintroduced atomism in a Christian-compatible form. His work inspired scientists like Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton to pursue explanations free of superstition. Epicurus's empirical mindset and rejection of supernatural causation make him a proto-scientist in spirit, contributing enduring methods for understanding nature.

Epicurus and the Rise of Utilitarianism

Epicurus's ethical philosophy, which centers on pleasure as the highest good, profoundly influenced later moral thinkers and laid the intellectual groundwork for utilitarianism.

- Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) built upon Epicurus's core idea that moral rightness is defined by actions that maximize happiness and minimize suffering.

- Bentham's hedonic calculus can be seen as a direct intellectual descendant of Epicurus's systematic method of weighing pleasures and pains.

- Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures parallels Epicurus's differentiation of kinetic (active) pleasures and katastematic (stable) pleasures, emphasizing the quality of happiness, not just quantity.

While the utilitarians departed from strict Epicurean doctrines, they inherited key themes: rational hedonism, pleasure as a natural guide for ethics, and the centrality of human well-being.

Influence on Modern Thought

Epicureanism's quiet but powerful influence persists across multiple modern disciplines:

- Secular Humanism embraces Epicurean dismissal of divine punishment, advocating reason, compassion, and ethical living independent of religious doctrine.

- Cognitive Science and Psychology reflect Epicurean insights about the origins of human fear, desire, and mental disturbance, anticipating therapeutic approaches to anxiety and wellbeing.

- Neuroscience and Philosophy of Mind draw from Epicurus's materialist view that the mind is physical—a foundation for contemporary debates on consciousness, free will, and ethics.

- Minimalist and Wellness Movements echo Epicurean values of simplicity, self-sufficiency (autarkeia), and the pursuit of inner peace over external excess.

- Democratic and Egalitarian Ideals find early expression in the Garden's radical inclusivity, offering a philosophical precedent for modern social justice movements.

Epicurus's call to live simply, think clearly, and value friendship continues to resonate in a world overwhelmed by noise, distraction, and existential fear.

A Legacy of Liberation

Epicurus's mission was freedom from pain, fear, and ignorance. His Garden was a philosophical sanctuary open to all who sought a well-lived life, transcending class, gender, and status. Through poetic witnesses like Lucretius, scientific explorers, ethical innovators, and modern thinkers, Epicurus's voice still echoes across millennia.

He taught that true happiness lies not in wealth or power but in tranquility, intellectual clarity, loyal friendship, and understanding the nature of reality. This rich legacy—a lineage from ancient atoms to modern ethics—remains vibrant, remarkably alive, and more necessary than ever.

Let us walk in the Garden again.

Resouces

Classical Philosophy Reading List

Plato

- The Republic

A foundational dialogue exploring justice, the ideal state, education, and the philosopher-king.

- Lucretius

- De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)

A poetic exposition of Epicurean physics, atomism, and natural philosophy.

Epicureanism & Atomism

- The Ancient Lowly Vol. 2: The Greek Atomists and Epicurus

A historical and philosophical account of early materialist thought and its social implications.

- Epicureanism by William M. Wallace

A concise philosophical overview of Epicurean ethics and metaphysics.

- Lucretius: Epicurean and Poet by John Masson, M.A., LL.D.

A literary and philosophical study of Lucretius' work and its Epicurean foundations.

- His Philosophy by Norman Wentworth DeWitt

A comprehensive modern interpretation of Epicurus' teachings and their relevance.

- Epicurus by A. E. Taylor

A scholarly introduction to Epicurean thought from a classical perspective.

Primary Texts by Epicurus

- Letter to Menoeceus

A summary of Epicurean ethics, emphasizing pleasure, tranquility, and rational living.

- Letter to Herodotus

A concise outline of Epicurean physics and cosmology, aimed at grounding philosophical inquiry.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Scholarly, peer-reviewed entries written by experts. Ideal for academic research and deep dives.

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Cortical Synaptic Basis of Consciousness

A 2023 review published in the European Journal of Neuroscience explores how consciousness emerges from complex neural networks. It highlights the role of thalamocortical projections, synaptic plasticity, and feedback/feedforward circuits in sustaining conscious awareness—even in cases of brain injury. The study emphasizes that consciousness is maintained through dynamic interactions among physical systems, particularly synaptic activity and long-term potentiation.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ejn.16198

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1. Neuroscience of Self-Affirmation

Journal: Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience

Key Findings:

- Self-affirmation activates brain regions linked to self-processing and reward, including the medial prefrontal cortex and ventral striatum.

- Participants who practiced affirmations showed increased openness to behavior change and reduced sedentary behavior.

- Suggests affirmations can reinforce core values and improve emotional regulation.

https://academic.oup.com/scan/article/11/4/621/2375054

2. Impact on Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being

Journal: International Journal of Indian Psychology (2024)

Key Findings:

- A study of 120 participants found a moderate positive correlation between daily affirmations and self-esteem.

- Affirmations significantly improved psychological well-being, including emotional resilience and life satisfaction.

- Highlights affirmations as a tool for cultivating a positive self-image and healthier lifestyle.

https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/18.01.422.20241202.pdf

3. The Brain’s Response to Positive Thinking

Source: MentalHealth.com

Key Findings:

- Affirmations help replace negative thought patterns with healthier cognitive responses.

- Linked to reduced cortisol levels, which lowers stress and improves physical health.

- Encourages self-worth, motivation, and resilience through consistent practice.

https://www.mentalhealth.com/tools/science-of-affirmations